Ramadan is set to begin on Wednesday in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and several North American countries after the crescent moon was sighted, heralding the holy month. In India, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar is likely to commence on Thursday, subject to moon sighting.

BUSINESS

Infosys & Anthropic tie up to build AI agents

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SPORTS

Australia knocked out of T20 World Cup

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 18 FEBRUARY 2026 | WEDNESDAY | BENGALURU | 29 SHABAN, 1447 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 42 | Pages: 8

India, France sign 21 tech, defence & minerals pacts

After biggest Rafale deal, India & France to now open AI hub

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, 17 FEB

India and France on Tuesday signed 21 agreements to deepen cooperation in critical minerals, defence, high technology, renewable energy and health, elevating ties to a "special global strategic partnership".

The agreements include enhanced defence cooperation, a joint venture between Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) and French defence major Safran to manufacture Hammer missiles in India, and reciprocal deployment of officers at Indian Army and French Land Forces establishments. The two sides also launched the 'India-France Year of Innovation' and signed an agreement to avoid double taxation and promote mutual investment.

Macron is on a three-day visit to India to attend the AI Summit 2026 in New Delhi.

FOCUS ON RAFALE

The visit comes days after India cleared its largest-ever defence deal for 114 Rafale fighter jets, with 96 to be manufactured in India, bolstering the 'Make in India' push.

However, India's push for defence indigenisation continues to face structural challenges. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) is grappling with bottlenecks in delivering fighter jets, which makes India heavily rely on Russia

Around 60–70 per cent of existing defence weapons, including Su-30MKI fighters, T-90 and T-72 tanks, and S-400 air defence systems, are Russian. The aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya, much of the submarine fleet and the BrahMos missile programme are also Russian made.

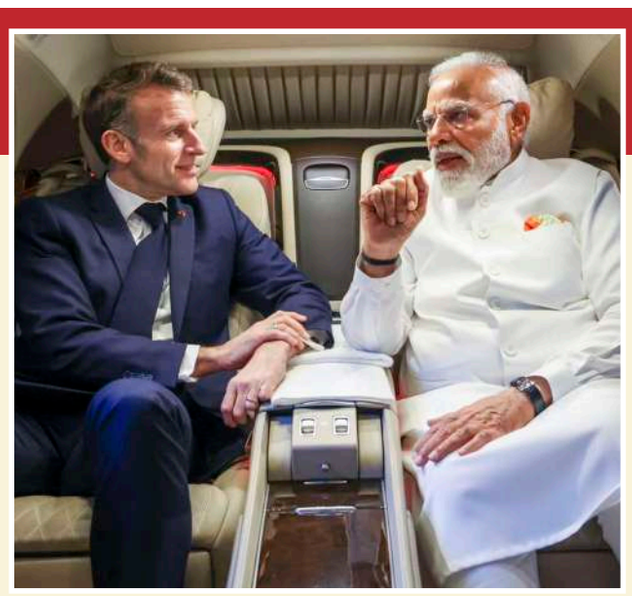
INDIA–FRANCE DEFENCE TIES: AT A GLANCE

A LOOK AT INDIA'S BIGGEST-EVER DEFENCE DEAL

- 3.25 lakh crore deal for 114 Rafale fighter jets.
- Manufacturer: France's Dassault Aviation.
- 18 jets to be delivered in fly-away condition (ready-made) from France.
- 96 jets to be manufactured in India.

PREVIOUS RAFALE ORDERS

- 36 Rafale jets delivered between July 2020 and December 2022 to Indian Air Force.
- 26 Rafale-M jets ordered in April 2025 for Navy but not yet delivered.
- With the new deal, India will operate 170+ jets and becomes the largest Rafale operator outside France.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with French President Emmanuel Macron during a car ride, in Mumbai. —*PTI*

French foreign direct investment in India totals $15B

Trade largely driven by defence and aerospace. 33.89% of India's imports from France are aircraft and spacecraft.

'FORCE FOR GLOBAL STABILITY'

"The world is going through a period of uncertainty. In such an environment, the India-France partnership is a force for global stability," Modi said. Macron described India as one of France's trusted partners.

AI AT FOREFRONT

Modi further said, "We are going to launch the Indo-French Centre for AI in Health, the Indo-French Centre for Digital Science and Technology, and the National Centre of Excellence for Skilling in Aeronautics. And these are not just institutions. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

New Delhi sees massive traffic jam as the national capital host AI Impact Summit, while long queues were seen outside Bharat Mandapam —*PTI*

GOVT APOLOGISES FOR CHAOS AT AI SUMMIT

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Tuesday apologised for the issues faced by attendees on the opening day of the India AI Impact Summit 2026.

The world's largest AI summit opened to packed halls and long queues on Monday, with over 70,000 attendees, including startup founders, global tech representatives, and international delegates. Heavy footfall led to overcrowding, long queues, overlapping security checks, and temporary evacuation of some exhibitor stalls ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit. Mobile data connectivity also suffered, adding to the confusion.

Amid the chaos, some exhibitors reported misplaced or stolen items. Dhananjay Yadav, CEO of Neo Sapien, said his company's AI wearables were stolen after security instructed them to leave their devices inside a cordoned area. "We paid for flights, accommodation, logistics and even the booth, only to see our wearables disappear inside a high-security zone," he said.

Other participants voiced frustration over mismanagement. Entrepreneur Priyanshu Ratnakar pointed to long queues, patchy Wi-Fi, and registration glitches, calling it "optics over execution."

"Exhibitors, delegates, startup founders (were) left outside. No water. No clarity. Media shows celebration. Ground reality was chaos. If access was limited to select high-value guests, just say it upfront. Don't mobilize the ecosystem and then displace them. This is not how we build India's AI future," Punit Jain, founder of Reskil, wrote on X.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said the summit's chaos is giving India "global embarrassment".

Vaishnaw assured that a war room is now operational to address issues. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 7

AMID EPSTEIN ROW, GATES TO ATTEND AI SUMMIT

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Conflicting reports emerged on Tuesday over Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates' attendance at the India AI Impact Summit 2026. Government sources said Gates was allegedly dropped from the keynote speaker list due to links in files related to the late Jeffrey Epstein, though a Gates Foundation spokesperson confirmed he will deliver his keynote on 19 February at 11.50am. When asked, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw avoided direct comment, calling attendance a "personal choice". Gates arrived in India on Monday, visiting Vijayawada to meet Andhra Pradesh leaders before the summit at Bharat Mandapam. —*PTI*

OVER 'JULY CHARTER' ROW

Tarique swears-in as B'desh PM amid ruckus

DHAKA, 17 FEB

BNP leader Tarique Rahman was sworn in on Tuesday as Bangladesh's new prime minister, ending 18 months of political uncertainty under the interim government led by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus.

Rahman, son of late president Ziaur Rahman and former premier Khaleda Zia, returned from 17 years of self-exile in London last December.

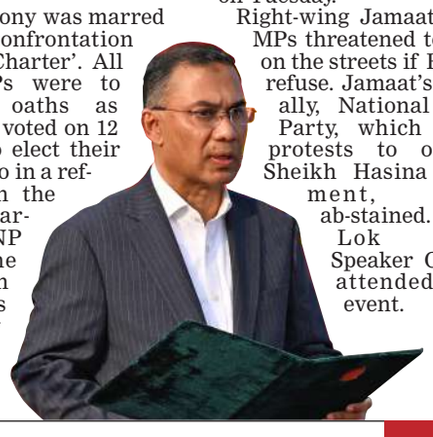
The ceremony was marred by fresh confrontation over 'July Charter'. All elected MPs were to take two oaths as Bangladesh voted on 12 February to elect their MPs and also in a referendum on the 'July Charter'. BNP swept the polls with two-thirds majority amid rigging allegations, while the July Charter refer-endum received 62 per cent 'yes' votes.

The July Charter will turn the Parliament into a Constituent Assembly for 180 days, letting the House amend the Constitution and democratic processes.

While the BNP signed the July Charter, it said that it was not consulted. As a result, BNP MPs refused to take oath as members of the Constitution Reform Council on Tuesday.

Right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami MPs threatened to protest on the streets if BNP MPs refuse. Jamaat's stu-dent ally, National Citizen Party, which led the protests to oust the Sheikh Hasina government, also ab-stained.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla attended the event. —*PTI*



WB, Assam, TN, Kerala polls in April

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The Assembly elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry could be held in April and its schedule is likely to be announced by mid-March, officials said on Tuesday. The terms of the five assemblies end in May and June.

While the five-year term of the Puducherry Assembly ends on 15 June, the terms of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal Assemblies end on 20, 23, 10, and 7 May respectively.

The EC has already started touring the poll-bound states and is in Assam now to assess poll preparedness. Last time, Assembly polls in West Bengal were held in eight phases. In Assam, elections were held in two phases, and in a single phase in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.

Puducherry was the first one to publish its final electoral roll on 14 February after the SIR of electoral rolls.

Tamil Nadu will publish its post-SIR final poll roll on Tuesday, while Kerala will do so on 21 February. West Bengal's final voters' list will be published on 28 February. — *PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

PERMIT NOW NEEDED TO SELL MEAT IN BIHAR

PATNA, 17 FEB

The Bihar government is likely to restrict open sales of meat, after earlier orders prohibiting the sale of meat near religious places.

Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha, who also holds revenue and land reforms portfolio, said on Monday that only licensed sellers would be allowed to sell meat.

"The government is framing new rules, and it will be enforced strictly. The sale of meat in the open will not be allowed. Only those with proper authorisation will be permitted to sell meat," he told the media. He also warned of action against those violating the new rules.

In March 2025, the Uttar Pradesh government banned the sale of meat within 500 metres of religious places. —*Agencies*

SC scolds lawyers for writing pleas with AI

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

—FREEPIK

As India hosts the world's largest artificial intelligence conclave, the AI Impact Summit-2026, to make a big pitch for the new technology, the Supreme Court on Tuesday red-flagged its flip side.

A top court bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant expressed serious concern over a growing trend of lawyers filing petitions drafted with AI tools that contain non-existent judgements such as 'Mercy vs Mankind'.

"We are alarmed to reflect that some lawyers have started using AI to draft petitions. It is absolutely uncalled for," the bench, also comprising Justices BV Nagarathna and Joymalya Bagchi, said.

It made the observations while hearing a PIL filed by academician Roop Rekha Verma seeking guidelines on political speeches.

Justice Nagarathna said she recently came across a non-existent citation, 'Mercy vs Mankind'.

She said that at times, the judgments referred to are correct, but fake quotes are attributed to those verdicts, making it very difficult to verify the contents. "It creates an additional burden on the judges," Justice Nagarathna said. Justice Bagchi, meanwhile, lamented the decline in the art of legal drafting and said many special leave petitions mostly comprise lengthy quotations from prior judgments, with little original articulation of legal grounds. —*PTI*

DOCUMENTARY HONOURS SECULAR VISIONARY K RAHMAN KHAN

A new Urdu documentary on Dr K Rahman Khan journals his unwavering commitment to education, social upliftment, and inclusive development.

Titled 'A Guiding Light for the Community', the documentary traces Dr Khan's contributions as a visionary leader who worked for empowerment and institutional growth. His tenure in public life reflects a combination of integrity, foresight, and humility. The film emphasizes how his leadership extended beyond politics, focusing instead on strengthening communities, promoting harmony, and nurturing young minds.

Eminent personalities reflect on his impact. Former vice president Hamid Ansari speaks of his intellectual clarity and balanced approach to public service. Veteran statesman Yashwant Sinha acknowledges his steadfast principles and dedication to democratic values. Former Rajya Sabha MP Adeeb highlights his administrative vision and community-oriented initiatives. Former chief minister M Veerappa Moily reflects on his inclusive outlook, while former minister Roshan Baig and Salar Publications Trustee Sadaqat Peeran recall his accessibility and personal warmth.

Adding a lyrical dimension to the film is a soulful ghazal rendered by Raghu Pati Jhai.

The documentary by Sabiha Zubair Khan stands as a historical record of a compassionate leader respected across political lines and ideologies.

Scan the QR code below to watch the documentary, streaming on Salar Urdu Digital Youtube from 15 February.

FIND BABY IN AN HOUR

Couple forgets child in cab, B'luru cops save the day

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

Bengaluru police saved the day after a four-year-old boy was accidentally left asleep inside a cab in Hennur on Friday night and reunited with his family within an hour.

The incident occurred on 14 February when the couple returned from a trip to their apartment in Pon-nappa Layout under Hennur police limits. Unaware that their child was still asleep in the back seat, they exited the taxi. On realising the vehicle had driven away with the boy inside, they immediately alerted the '112' emergency helpline.

- The incident occurred on 14 February when the couple returned from a trip to Bengaluru.

Hennur police swung into action, relaying details to ASI Manjappa Koppal and Head Constable Satish. By then, the driver had completed two additional trips, unaware the child was in the vehicle.

After being contacted, the driver checked and found the boy, Jian, sleeping safely. Police instructed him not to wake the child and tracked the cab's live location while directing him back. Officers reached the apartment within minutes, and the child was safely handed over.

The incident has gone viral, drawing praise for the police response and criticism of the parents.

Police later counselled the couple to exercise greater caution. —*Salar News*

—AI

India, France sign deals for Hammer missiles, H125 choppers

Rajnath, French counterpart open India's 1st pvt manufacturing facility

KOLAR, 17 FEB

India and France on Tuesday signed deals on Hammer Missiles production and a 10-year defence cooperation agreement.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) were signed in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his French counterpart, Catherine Vautrin in Bengaluru.

Rajnath and Vautrin co-chaired the 6th India-France Annual Defence Dialogue in the City.

The first MoU concerns amendments to and the renewal of a 10-year defence cooperation agreement, signed by Indian Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and Deputy Director General of International Relations and Strategy, France, Lt Gen Eric Peltier.

The second MoU on a joint venture to manufacture Hammer missiles was signed and exchanged between Chairman and MD of Bharat Electronics Limited, Manoj Jain, and Executive Vice President and Defence Director of Safran Electronics and Defence, Alexander Ziegler.

Rajnath and Vautrin also launched India's first private-sector helicopter manufacturing facility for the Airbus H125 at Vemagal, in Kolar.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and French Defence Minister Catherine Vautrin during the launch of Tata Advanced Systems Limited's (TASL) final assembly line for the Airbus H125 helicopters *PTI*

The H125 is the only helicopter in history to have landed on the summit of Mount Everest, giving it a performance ceiling that exceeds existing light utility fleets.

For the Indian military, which operates in some of the world's most challenging high-and-hot environments, this performance can be a critical differentiator.

The newly inaugurated Helicopter Final Assembly line in the industrial area of Vemagal will roll out its first helicopter by mid-2017, said Union Civil Aviation Minister KR Naidu.

He said that said with an investment of over 100 million Euros, the company will provide direct and indirect jobs to skilled personnel in the area and lauded aerospace and defence as the cornerstones of India-France relations. The H125 is the world's best-selling single-engine helicopter.

—Salar News with agencies

France, K'taka seek to deepen ties in AI, defence

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

Karnataka and France on Tuesday explored deeper collaboration in artificial intelligence, aerospace and defence manufacturing during talks between IT-BT Minister Priyank Kharge and French Minister Delegate for AI and Digital Affairs Anne Le Hénaff.

The meeting focused on strengthening partnerships in innovation, skilling, startup ecosystems and digital governance.

According to a statement from Kharge's office, both sides expressed interest in building structured, long-term cooperation, particularly in technology infrastructure and advanced manufacturing.

France highlighted its growing demand for skilled engineers and tech professionals and proposed structured talent development partnerships with Karnataka.

The discussions built on existing Indo-French ties in aerospace, animation and emerging technologies, including Centres of Excellence, academic collaborations and startup exchange programmes.

Kharge outlined the State's plan to develop innovation, skills and manufacturing corridors with global partners, leveraging the Global Innovation Alliance (GIA).

He proposed creating a dedicated institutional platform in the state to support French startups, SMEs and MSMEs seeking market access, R&D collaboration and a sustained presence in India.

"A couple of areas where we can move quickly and decisively are skills, innovation and advanced manufacturing," Kharge said, adding that Bengaluru could serve as a gateway for French firms entering India, while Paris could open doors for Karnataka startups in the European Union.

Hénaff said France's AI policy prioritises sustainability, public interest and child protection, stressing opportunities for responsible and inclusive AI cooperation with Karnataka. *— PTI*

2 YOUTH INJURED

Stone-pelting spark tension in Ch'magaluru town

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 17 FEB

Tension gripped the Vijayapura area of Chikkamagaluru late on Monday night following allegations of stone-pelting, triggering protests by members of two communities and police deployment.

Allegations surfaced that some youths from a community had pelted stones at houses over the past week and harassed girls during the last three days, police said.

Police sources said two youths who were found moving in a suspicious manner were caught by activists of an organisation, beaten up and handed over to the police.

Soon after, hundreds of youths from both communities gathered in front of the Basavanahalli Police Station and the government hospital.

While one group claimed they were not involved in stone-pelting, another group demanded action against those responsible for the attacks on houses and alleged harassment.

Police, who were alerted in advance, rushed to the spot and dispersed the crowd.

Authorities said they struggled for some time before bringing the situation under control. Tight security was in place across the city.

The two injured youths are undergoing treatment at the government hospital. *— PTI*

Yelahanka to get largest railway terminal

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

Union Minister of State for Railways V Somanna said that the Centre will set up India's largest mega coaching terminal in Bengaluru's Yelahanka at the cost at Rs 5,754 crore.

The State already has projects worth Rs 52,950 crore under implementation, he said after inaugurating the Road Over Bridge (ROB) between KSR Bengaluru and Nayandahalli Railway stations.

The station was initially supposed to come up at Devanahalli, Somanna said, but has been shifted due to distance.

The railways will now assess the feasibility of Yelahanka for the mega terminal, and then prepare a Detailed Project Report.

The terminal is expected to have 16 platforms, 12 pit lines and 24 stabling lines among other facilities. *—Agencies*

Man attacked by son in B'luru's Indiranagar, dies

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

A 70-year-old man who was grievously wounded after allegedly being attacked by his son succumbed to his injuries in the City on Tuesday, police said. The incident occurred at Doopanahalli under the limits of the Indiranagar police station in the City on Saturday night. According to police, the accused, identified as Mohana Kumar, allegedly attacked his father, Munikrishnappa, with a sharp-edged weapon and fled the scene. The man was rushed to a hospital, where he died earlier in the day. Police have arrested the accused and registered a case of murder against him. Further investigation is underway to ascertain the circumstances surrounding the incident. *—PTI*

—FREEPIK

Bengaluru airport shipped 60m roses for Valentine's

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

As the Valentine's season drove peak demand of fresh roses worldwide, Kempegowda International Airport in the City shipped around 60 million rose stems, weighing more than 2,700 tonnes, across 26 international destinations, officials said on Tuesday. The facility, operated by Bangalore International Airport Limited, also transported roses to 47 domestic destinations. The exports mark a 38 per cent year-on-year increase in stem volumes and a 64 per cent rise in tonnage, reinforcing the airport's position as India's leading gateway for perishable exports for five consecutive years, they said. "This momentum is further supported by expanded cargo infrastructure of BLR Airport ensuring freshness, speed, and temperature precision." *—PTI*

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HC quashes BJP's defamation case against Rahul Gandhi

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday quashed the defamation proceedings initiated by the BJP against Congress leader **Rahul Gandhi.**

Challenging the defamation case, Gandhi approached the High Court, arguing that continuing the proceedings would be an abuse of the legal process.

The case, which was filed in 2023 while the BJP was in power in the State, alleged that a Congress advertisement highlighting large-scale irregularities under the party's rule was defamatory.

- The case stemmed from the Cong's "corruption rate card" ads, published when the BJP was in power in 2023. The HC dismissed the plea, saying the ads were criticising the policies, not the BJP

However, the court observed that the "corruption rate card" advertisements were a criticism of the government's administration, not the political party as a private entity.

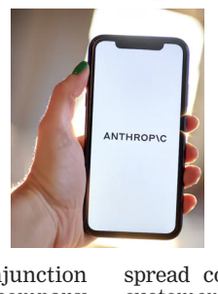
The Court noted that if the Government was defamed, only the State could file a complaint.

The complaint alleged a conspiracy between Rahul Gandhi and two prominent Karnataka leaders. *—Agencies*

Anthropic vs Anthropic: Court summons US firm

BELAGAVI, 17 FEB

A Belagavi commercial court has issued a fresh summons on Monday to US-based AI firm Anthropic PBC after it failed to appear in a trademark suit. The case was filed by the local company Anthropic Softwares Private Limited, which alleges that the American firm's entry into India infringes on its brand name.



The company sought a temporary injunction restraining the US company from directly or indirectly passing itself off as being associated with it by using the mark "Anthropic" or any other identical or deceptively similar mark.

It claimed that it has been using the name "Anthropic" since 2017 and that it has acquired significant goodwill over the years in the Indian subcontinent.

The plaintiff argued that the US firm has effectively erased their online presence, displacing the Belagavi-based company from search results. This has triggered widespread confusion, misleading customers and stakeholders into believing the American giant has either replaced or is affiliated with the Indian company. *—Agencies*

Can tail wag the dog? Minister on leadership row

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

Social Welfare Minister HC Mahadevappa asked if the "tail wags the dog", a jab at Congress legislators attempting to pressure the High Command into making Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar the Chief Minister.

Speaking in Mysuru, Mahadevappa dismissed speculation about a change in guard by invoking a High Court observation on stray dogs.

"Who can give direction to the party High Command? Can you and me direct it? It's they who can give us direction and not the other way round. What if tail wags the dog?" he told press in Mysuru on Tuesday. "The High Court says time and again to catch stray dogs and confine them."

Mahadevappa is considered close to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

Shivakumar told press in Bengaluru that he doesn't want to comment.

"It is a decision taken by me, Siddaramaiah and the party High Command. Time will answer what the decision was. There is nothing hidden in this dealing. Siddaramaiah himself will answer the people when the time comes," he added.

Shivakumar's brother, DK Suresh, said that: "Devout Congress leaders are not stray canines but honest dogs. They never ditch those who favoured them. They clear the debts of their master."

Meanwhile, BJP leader Chalavadi Narayanaswamy quipped that: "Congress like dogs very much." *—PTI*

Netas urges Guv to clear Internal Quota Bill for SCs

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

A delegation led by Karnataka Minister KH Muniyappa met Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot and submitted a memorandum seeking approval for the Internal Reservation Bill meant for Scheduled Castes.

The delegation, which included Excise Minister RB Thimmapur, MLAs, MLCs and community leaders, visited Lok Bhavan in Bengaluru and urged the Governor to grant assent to the Bill passed by both Houses of the State legislature.

In the memorandum, the delegation stated that they requested Gehlot to accord approval at the bill at the earliest.

"The Bill would help provide reservation among 101 sub-castes within the Scheduled Castes in accordance with the principles of social justice and equality under the Constitution," the memorandum stated.

- The Bill aims to provide 17% internal reservation to SCs. The delegation noted that it had been passed by the Parliament

The Internal Reservation Bill seeks to ensure equitable distribution of reservation benefits among various sub-castes within the Scheduled Castes, amid longstanding demands that certain communities were not receiving proportional representation in education and employment.

—PTI

US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor meets CM Siddaramaiah at his Kaveri residence; BJP MP Tejasvi Surya and Gor enjoy idly at Filter Coffee, Indiranagar, on Tuesday and Monday *—SALAR/X @TEJASVI_SURYA*

US envoy Gor meets CM, Tejasvi

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor met Chief Minister Siddaramaiah at his official residence, Kaveri, and BJP MP Tejasvi Surya in Bengaluru on Tuesday.

During his meeting with Siddaramaiah and other officials, Gor held discussions of mutual interest, according to a statement by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO).

"Karnataka values its engagement with global partners and remains committed to strengthening international cooperation", the statement said.

Earlier, Surya termed Bengaluru as the "crown jewel" of the India-US partnership as he welcomed Gor to the City.

"Gor brings uncommon energy and dynamism to diplomacy, and a true belief in India-US's limitless potential. A late-night Namma Auto ride is the real Bengaluru experience," Surya stated on X. *—ANI*

3 FOREIGNERS AMONG THE NABBED

15 held for selling drugs worth Rs 10.59 cr

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

In a major crackdown on illegal narcotics trade, Bengaluru police have arrested fifteen people, including three foreigners, across the City and seized illegal drugs worth Rs 10.59 crore, police said on Tuesday.

The arrests were made during joint operations following specific inputs about drug trafficking.

"The CCB Narcotics Control Wing and the city police arrested 15 persons, including three foreigners and 12 persons from other states, for selling narcotic substances like hydroponic ganja, MDMA, cocaine, LSD pills, LSD strips, hashish oil and ganja," a release issued by the police commissioner's office said.

Cases were registered under the NDPS Act based on information that narcotic substances were being sold in Amruthahalli, Hebbagodi, JP Nagar, Sheshadripuram, Mahalakshmi Layout and Govindapura.

City Police Commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh takes a look at the stash of drugs seized during the operations, on Tuesday — *SALAR*

Police said that during interrogation the accused admitted to the offence =.

"The accused confessed that they procured narcotic substances like hydroponic ganja, ganja, MDMA, cocaine, LSD pills, LSD strips and hashish oil from unidentified foreigners and out-of-state persons and were selling them to the public, college students and IT/BT employees," it said.

Police said a large quantity of drugs were seized.

"The seized items include 9 kg 460 grams of hydroponic ganja, 5 kg 677 grams of MDMA, 34 kg of ganja, 131 grams of cocaine, 462 ml of hashish oil, 29 LSD pills, 27 grams of LSD strips, one car, one two-wheeler and four phones. The total value of the seized property is Rs 10.59 crore (market value Rs 21.50 crore)," the release stated. Rs 24,500 in cash was also seized from the accused. *— PTI*

KMF TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST DEFAMATORY CONTENT ON NANDINI

BENGALURU, 17 FEB

The Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF) has threatened to take legal actions against "defamatory statements" made on social media which question the safety of Nandini and other products.

Baseless and false allegations have been made against few Nandini products projecting the products as unsafe for consumption, KMF said in a statement posted on X late on Monday.

"KMF requests its consumers not to get confused to baseless allegations and assures that all our milk and milk products are safe for consumption," it stated. "KMF is following strictly safe and approved methods framed by Statutory bodies and Food Safety Standards Authority of India."

It strongly refuted the statements and said it was forced to initiate legal action against the perpetrators. KMF is among the largest dairy cooperatives in India. *—Salar News*

- Some social media accounts had claimed that Nandini products were substandard and bad for health - a claim KMF refuted

Ex-Assam Cong chief Borah to join BJP

Borah took the decision following his meeting with Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma

GUWAHATI, 17 FEB

Former Assam Congress president Bhupen Borah will join the BJP on February 22, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said at a press conference here on Tuesday after meeting him.

Sarma visited Borah's residence in the Ghoramara area of Guwahati, a day after the senior leader resigned from the Congress.

The CM was welcomed by Borah's wife and son with 'aarti'.

After the meeting, Sarma said state BJP chief Dilip Saikia would hold discussions with Borah to finalise details of his joining the party.

Borah joining the BJP will show that Congress is not a place for Hindus, he claimed.

Sarma claimed Bora has struggled for a long time in the Congress, and he will get a platform in the BJP to do what he wants.

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma with former state Congress president Bhupen Borah during a press conference, in Guwahati, Tuesday —PTI

The CM claimed that Congress should have addressed issues that forced Borah to leave the party after 32 years and taken corrective measures.

Borah had resigned from the Congress on Monday, but the party's top leadership did not accept his resignation, making attempts to persuade him to take it back. Following this, he sought time to reconsider his decision.

Earlier in the day, Borah told reporters that there were many issues he would like to discuss with his well-wishers, close associates and people of Lakhimpur district, from where he hails, before taking a final decision.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who had on Monday said the doors of the BJP were open for Borah and promised to "get him elected from a safe assembly seat" if he joined the saffron party, visited his residence in the evening.

Borah launched an attack on a section of the Congress leaders without naming them, saying he was prepared to stay in the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) but not in "APCC (R)", in an apparent reference to the party's Dhubri MP Rakibul Hussain. —PTI

Assam govt tables Rs 62,294.78 cr interim budget ahead of polls

GUWAHATI, 17 FEB

- Tabling her last budget before the state goes to polls, Neog said Assam is the fastest-growing state according to RBI data.

Presenting a Rs 62,294.78 crore interim budget for the 2026-27 fiscal ahead of the Assembly elections, Assam Finance Minister Ajanta Neog said on Tuesday that Assam provided 1,58,000 jobs, started manufacturing semiconductors, built five new airports, and raised per capita income from Rs 86,947 to Rs 1,85,429 in the last five years.

She said that all major flagship schemes giving direct cash benefits to the public will continue. Tabling her last budget before the state goes to polls, Neog said Assam is the fastest-growing state according to RBI data.

"I seek a vote on account on the demands for grants for the initial months of the financial year 2026-27, amounting to Rs 62,29,478.30 lakh to enable the government to carry on with its services pending full budget," she said.

Neog claimed that the flagship 'Nijut Moina' scheme resulted in an 8.2 per cent reduction in dropout among girl students between 2023-24 and 2024-25, and an increase in the gross enrolment ratio for girls by 4.2 per cent at the secondary level. —PTI

Cow slaughter issue disrupts R'than assembly

JAIPUR, 17 FEB

The Rajasthan Legislative Assembly was adjourned five times on Tuesday amid fierce clashes between the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and the Opposition Indian National Congress over cow slaughter and demands to grant cows "Rajya Mata" status. During Question Hour, a BJP MLA raised concerns over illegal bovine transport and slaughter. Animal Husbandry Minister Joraram Kumawat said no proposal to confer such status is under consideration, though strict laws are in place. Leader of Opposition Tika Ram Jully cited an alleged slaughter at a Jaipur gaushala, accusing BJP members of shielding the accused. Speaker Vasudev Devnani repeatedly adjourned proceedings following uproar and sloganeering. —PTI

WB BJP MLA summoned for extortion

KOLKATA, 17 FEB

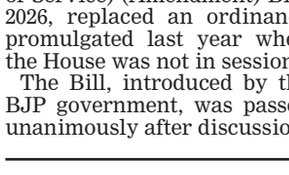
BJP Bengal MLA Ashok Dinda has been summoned by police in Purba Medinipur over allegations that some officers extort money from fish-laden Lorries in his Moyna constituency. Superintendent of Police (In-Charge) Mitun Dey said the notice, issued on 14 February, under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, asks Dinda to provide substantive evidence. He was due to appear on 16 February but, through his lawyer, sought another date. Dinda called the move harassment by the "new police super" but said he would comply and request time between 21 and 23 February. BJP Chief Whip Sankar Ghosh alleged police were targeting Opposition MLA instead of investigating the claims. —PTI

SC reserves plea in Arunachal CM's PwD case

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The Supreme Court of India has reserved its order on a plea seeking a CBI probe into the award of public works contracts in Arunachal Pradesh to firms linked to Chief Minister Pema Khandu's family. A bench led by Justice Vikram Nath was told that contracts and work orders worth about Rs 1,270 crore were awarded over the past decade to four firms allegedly connected to Khandu, his wife, mother and brother. Senior advocate Prashant Bhushan claimed this amounted to nearly three per cent of all contracts in the state and sought a CBI inquiry, alleging corruption. The state termed the plea "sponsored litigation". —PTI

VIRAL SHOT



Union Minister Kiren Rijiju posted a video of him pushing a car through snow on Tuesday in Arunachal Pradesh. The Congress quipped: 'nation salutes the cameraman' —X

Centre withholding funds to states: Vijayan

T'PURAM, 17 FEB

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday said states across India were facing growing fiscal constraints while their responsibilities in public service delivery and development were expanding, stressing the need for predictability and fairness in intergovernmental fiscal arrangements.

Addressing the valedictory session of the Vision 2031 International Conference here, he said states today play an increasingly important role in delivering public services and driving development, but their fiscal space has become more constrained.

Referring to Kerala's experience, Vijayan said the state has consistently mobilised a high proportion of its own revenues and maintained strong

public service delivery, even as changes in intergovernmental fiscal arrangements, borrowing limits, and the structure of central transfers have created new challenges.

He said the issue should be viewed not in the language of confrontation but as a matter of democratic governance.

"Cooperative federalism requires predictability, fairness, and respect for constitutional roles. States must have the fiscal capacity to fulfil the responsibilities entrusted to them, particularly in areas such as health, education, social protection, and infrastructure," he said.

According to him, despite constraints, Kerala has continued to prioritise welfare, education and public services. Measures supporting students, workers and vulnerable groups reflect an effort to balance fiscal responsibility with social commitment.

At a time when many societies, including India, are witnessing growing polarisation, Kerala has largely preserved social harmony through inclusive public institutions and a culture of mutual respect, he said. —PTI

Tamil Nadu FM blames Centre for creating fiscal crisis

CHENNAI, 17 FEB

Presenting the Interim Budget for 2026-27 in the Assembly, Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Thangam Thenarasu on Tuesday said the union government appears to leave no stone unturned to artificially precipitate a fiscal crisis in Tamil Nadu. Making Budgetary allocations and explaining the flagship schemes of the government and its impact, the Minister said in a federal polity, there were several instances in the past where states had been unfairly treated by the union government. —PTI

PUDUCHERRY POLLS

EC allots 'Torch Light' symbol to MNM

PUDUCHERRY, 17 FEB

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has issued a notification allotting the "Torch Light" symbol to the Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) for the 2026 Legislative Assembly elections in Puducherry.

The notification comes as the poll body intensifies preparations for the upcoming Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. On 11 February, a seven-member team of Deputy Election Commissioners arrived at Chennai International Airport to review poll preparedness.

Senior Deputy Election Commissioner Maneesh Garg told reporters, "A team of officials from the Election Commission has reached Chennai and Puducherry to review the poll preparedness." The team is assessing the readiness of election machinery, including logistics, personnel deployment and coordination with local authorities in both regions.

Meanwhile, political activity has intensified in Tamil Nadu with alliance discussions underway.

Charging the ruling AINRC-BJP with failing to address issues, including unemployment, AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal said a Congress coalition government would be formed after the upcoming polls in this union territory. —Agencies

Black box from Ajit's crash to be sent abroad

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, 17 FEB

The flight data recorder recovered from the 28 January air crash that claimed the life of Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar may be sent abroad for specialised analysis, according to government officials.

The aircraft's black box has been retrieved from the crash site near Baramati in Pune district, but it was found in a severely damaged and burnt condition.

The Learjet 45 aircraft VT-SSK was equipped with two independent flight recorders. Both recorders were exposed to intense heat for a prolonged period during the accident and sustained fire damage. .

Former deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar and four others died in the crash-landing while travelling from Mumbai to Baramati to campaign for Zilla Panchayat elections. NCP (SP) MLA Ro Pawar noted that, "20 days have passed since the accident yet the investigation hasn't gained any momentum. Is the delay solely to allow the VSR company to destroy evidence or does the company have someone's protection?" —PTI

TIPU-SHIVAJI ROW: CONG CHIEF SORRY

MUMBAI, 17 FEB

Maharashtra Congress Chief Harshwardhan Sapkal apologised after facing criticism for allegedly comparing Shivaji Maharaj with Tipu Sultan.

Sapkal stated his remarks were "deliberately distorted" by the BJP to create social tension. He clarified that he intended to promote unity by displaying icons together, not to insult Shivaji Maharaj. Sapkal said he had only mentioned Tipu Sultan drew inspiration from Shivaji Maharaj.

He emphasised Shivaji Maharaj remains his "ideal, inspiration, and pride", adding that historical debates should be balanced and scholarly. —PTI

J&K statehood back soon says Centre

SRINAGAR, 17 FEB

Union Minister for Law and Justice Arjun Meghwal on Tuesday said statehood to Jammu and Kashmir would be restored soon, prompting a response from Chief Minsiter Omar Abdullah who said that he hoped that the wait is not long.

After attending the International Conference Centre (SKICC) at the Sher-i-Kashmir, Meghwal told reporters about the "sensitive issue", Union Home Minister Amit Shah has said in the LoK Sabha that J-K's statehood would be restored.

"You will get it but there is a process. I feel you will soon get to hear about a decision," he said.

"The process is on, (though) it is taking longer. We have not got it yet. We have not given up hope, we are talking to the Centre on it," he added

Reacting to Meghwal's comment, Abdullah, who was also present at the function, said, "It has been one and a half years of wait. We hope we do not have to wait much longer," Abdullah told reporters. —PTI

UNITED BY CULTURE

French President Emmanuel Macron jogging on Marine Drive in Mumbai on Tuesday. Later in the day, he and First Lady Brigitte Macron met with actor Manoj Bajpayee; actors and producers Richa Chadha and Anil Kapoor, director Zoya Akhtar, Grammy winner Ricky Kej - X/@EMMANUELMACRON

B'desh funding Humayun's mosque: BJP

KOLKATA, 17 FEB

BJP leader **Suvendu Adhikari** on Tuesday claimed that JUP's Humayun Kabir received half the funding for his mosque modelled on the Babri Masjid from Bangladesh.

Adhikari, the leader of the opposition in the West Bengal Assembly, claimed Kabir went to Bangladesh on 28 September 2025 to arrange funds.

"Kabir raised 50 per cent of the funding for his mosque in Beldannga from Bangladeshis, that is, people associated with outfits like the Jamaat. He is helping the TMC to counter the anti-Mamata wave among minorities," Adhikari said.

Claiming that Kabir was the link between the Jamat and the TMC, he said, "Islamic fundamentalists are consolidating their bases on both sides of the India-Bangladesh border. The situation is alarming for Bengali Hindus."

Kabir, who was expelled by the TMC, claimed that Adhikari lost sanity. —PTI

FOR COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENT

Gujarat bill allows night-shift for women

GANDHINAGAR, 17 FEB

In a push to create job opportunities and improve work conditions, the Gujarat legislative assembly on Tuesday passed an amendment bill extending daily working hours and allowing women to work on night shifts in shops and commercial establishments.

The Gujarat Shops and Establishments (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) (Amendment) Bill, 2026, replaced an ordinance promulgated last year when the House was not in session.

The Bill, introduced by the BJP government, was passed unanimously after discussion,

with the opposition Congress extending its support following assurances from Labour, Skill Development and Employment Minister Kunvarji Bavaliya regarding proper safeguards and implementation.

The legislation amends the Gujarat Shops and Establishments (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 2019.

According to the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill, the 2019 Act was enacted to improve working conditions of employees, create more job opportunities for women and provide a favourable environment for doing business, including freedom to operate establishments 365 days, and permitting women to work on night shifts with adequate safety provisions.

The Bill proposes that any woman, with her consent, can work on the night shift between 9 pm and 6 am at any shop or establishment, provided that the employer ensures adequate protection of dignity and safety, protection from sexual harassment, and provides facilities such as rest rooms, night creches and separate toilets. Minister Bavaliya informed the House that apart from these facilities, transportation from the workplace to residence must also be provided to women working night shifts. —PTI

Navjot Kaur Sidhu says Rahul killing Congress

COIMBATORE, 17 FEB

In a scathing attack against Congress Lok Sabha MP Rahul Gandhi, former Congress leader from **Navjot Kaur Sidhu** on Tuesday accused the former of turning a blind eye to their demand to act against internal corruption and 'killing' the party in Punjab.

'You don't deserve that chair,' Sidhu, who has quit the Congress said. "You have to be in touch with the ground reality to know. You can't be living in a dream world," she charged.

She alleged that Rahul Gandhi's inner circle is busy selling election tickets while he remains unaware of situation.

"Rahul Gandhi talks good. He talks sense. But what he does and what he says is very different. For the past eight months, I have been asking for a time to tell him that your people, your president or your person appointed in Punjab is not doing justice to Punjab. He's killing Congress in Punjab. I'm just asking you for a seating to tell you that your party is being destroyed in Punjab. They have already sold the tickets," she said. —Agencies

DU cites law and order, bans campus protests

DELHI, 17 FEB

Delhi University (DU) has announced a one-month ban on public meetings, processions, demonstrations, and protests on campus, citing traffic obstruction, safety threats, and public peace disturbance. An order from the proctor's office states that "unrestricted public gatherings" could escalate and impact law and order. It references a prior police directive prohibiting public meetings, slogans, and hazardous materials. Manoj Kumar, DU proctor, said protests often escalated and spread, damaging law and order. The ban is effective immediately and may be withdrawn earlier. Mithuraj Dhusiya, DU associate professor, called it a "blanket clampdown" and questioned the justification for restricting protests over issues like appointments and policy debates. —*PTI*

—*PTI*

Irrawaddy dolphins sighted near Odisha river mouth

BERHAMPUR, 17 FEB

The Rushikulya river mouth in Odisha's Ganjam district, known for Olive Ridley turtle nesting, has been identified as a habitat for Irrawaddy dolphins. Forest officials observed 13 critically endangered dolphins during a three-day census conducted from 20-22 January. The dolphins surfaced and moved in groups within the area. Dibya Shankar Behera, assistant conservator of forests, said the census indicated a healthy dolphin presence along the Purunabandh-Prayagi stretch. The dolphins may have migrated from Chilika Lake, where they are more numerous. Villagers, aware of turtle protection, are now also being informed about safeguarding aquatic animals like dolphins.—*PTI*

Five Beed teachers suspended for facilitating copying

BEED, 17 FEB

Five teachers, who were caught allegedly facilitating large-scale copying during HSC (Class 12) examination at a centre in Maharashtra's Beed district, have been suspended, an official said on Tuesday. The police had registered a First Information Report against 17 teachers after a drone camera exposed large-scale copying on 10 February, the first day of the Class 12 exams at Centre 224 in Chousala. Drone mounted cameras captured supervisors in 16 examination halls, not only failing to prevent copying but also helping students to cheat openly. —*PTI*

IIT Kharagpur, Russia varsity to exchange students

KOLKATA, 17 FEB

IIT Kharagpur has signed a MoU with Empress Catherine II Saint Petersburg Mining University, Russia, in a virtual ceremony, to promote student and scholar exchanges, joint research, and academic programmes. The partnership aims to strengthen Indo-Russian cooperation in higher education and research, focusing on areas like mining, petroleum, rubber, mechanical, chemical engineering, geology, geophysics and AI applications. The collaboration builds on a longstanding India-Russia partnership in science and technology. Both institutions emphasised the importance of advancing technological innovation and human resource development to meet evolving energy needs, from conventional resources to critical minerals for energy transition. —*PTI*

Many people involved: Kin of RG Kar victim move court

Interrogate cop who probed case first, demand parents

KOLKATA, 17 FEB

The parents of a woman medic, who was raped and murdered inside state-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in 2024 August, moved a court here on Tuesday pleading for the custodial interrogation of those present with her during the night shift on the day of the incident to find out the "larger conspiracy" angle.

Expressing dissatisfaction over the CBI probe, which stated that civic volunteer Sanjay Roy was the sole perpetrator, the victim's parents said the Kolkata police officer who was involved in the initial investigation should also be questioned to probe the "larger conspiracy angle" which was "overlooked" in both the investigations conducted by the city police and the CBI.

"We are of the firm view that Sanjay Roy cannot be the sole person involved in brutalising our daughter, who was killed while on duty. There were a few others, and we pray before the Sealdah court that all of them, including the Kolkata Police officer, be taken into custody and interrogated," her father told reporters.

He said although the CBI has claimed that a polygraph test had conclusively proven the involvement of only Sanjay Roy, such a test cannot be cited as irrefutable evidence, as mentioned in several court orders.

"We have requested the court to look into our petition and the larger conspiracy theory. The petition has been accepted," he said.

The distraught parents had recently participated in a rally on the birth anniversary of the victim. — *PTI*

RG Kar Medical College students and residents protest demanding a thorough probe into the case —*ANI*

Unnao case: CBI opposes Jaideep's bail extension

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The CBI opposed in the Delhi High Court on Tuesday a plea by Jaideep Sengar, the brother of expelled BJP leader Kuldeep Sengar, seeking an extension of the interim bail by three months in the custodial death case of the Unnao rape survivor's father.

Jaideep Sengar, 50, who was awarded a 10-year jail term in the case by the trial court, sought an extension as he was suffering from oral cancer.

The CBI's counsel said it was not a fit case for extension of interim bail, and the prescription given by Jaideep Sengar in support of his plea was not genuine but fabricated.

The CBI counsel added that he should have come before the court "well within time" for any such extension.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma, however, extended the interim bail to Jaideeep Sengar till 20 February and asked the CBI to file a "detailed" verification report.

"You have to tell me whether this man is suffering from cancer. If he is not, you have to give me a clear report on whether this is genuine or not," the court told the CBI counsel.

Jaideep said he was suffering from Stage IV oral cancer, a life-threatening condition, and had developed clinical signs of recurrence. — *PTI*

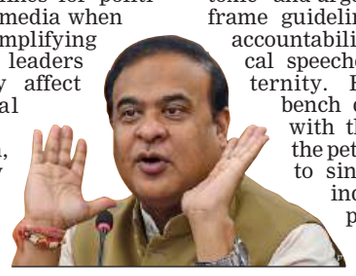
Unnao case accused Kuldeep Sengar being escorted out by the police after a court appearance —*PTI*

SC rejects pleas against Assam CM

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Political leaders must foster fraternity in the country, the Supreme Court observed on Tuesday while asking 12 petitioners, including academician Roop Rekha Verma, to file a fresh plea seeking guidelines on political speeches.

Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices B V Nagarathna and Joymalya Bagchi, however, declined to entertain a PIL seeking guidelines for politicians and the media when reporting or amplifying speeches by leaders that allegedly affect constitutional values.



The petition, argued by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, was moved in the backdrop of alleged hate speeches by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

On Monday, a CJI-led bench refused to entertain petitions seeking action against the Assam chief minister over a viral video purportedly showing him taking aim and firing with a rifle at members of the Muslim community.

On Tuesday, Sibal said that the atmosphere had become "toxic" and urged the bench to frame guidelines to ensure accountability when political speeches vitiate fraternity. However, the bench did not agree, with the CJI saying the petition appeared to single out select individuals of a particular political party. — *PTI*

COURT RULES OUT FOUL PLAY

Actress' suicide: SC rejects plea, asks convict to surrender after 23 years

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The Supreme Court dismissed the plea of a man challenging his conviction in the death of Telugu actress Pratyusha in 2002, and directed him to surrender within four weeks.

Ruling out that there was strangulation and rape in the case on Tuesday, Justices Rajesh Bindal and Manmohan also dismissed the plea filed by P Sarojini Devi, Pratyusha's mother, who alleged foul play in the death.

Pratyusha died in Hyderabad on 24 February 2002.

In 2011, the Andhra Pradesh High Court reduced the jail sentence of G Siddhartha Reddy, who was convicted for her death, to two years from the five years earlier awarded.

The trial court had in 2004 sentenced Reddy to five years' imprisonment and slapped a fine of Rs 5,000 for abetment of suicide. It had also awarded him one more year of imprisonment and a fine of Rs 1,000 for attempting suicide.

The case against Reddy is that he and Pratyusha were in love for six years. While the relationship was acceptable to Pratyusha's mother, Reddy's mother did not agree and they both decided to commit suicide.

On 23 February 2002, both of them went in a car, purchased pesticide, mixed it in coke and consumed it. However, later they decided that they should not die and drove to Care Hospital in Hyderabad. But Pratyusha died and Reddy survived. — *PTI*

51 Kuki students evacuated from Ukhrul after clashes

IMPHAL, 17 FEB

The police have evacuated 51 Kuki students from a school in Manipur's Naga-majority Ukhrul district as a precautionary measure, after clashes between the two communities, a statement said on Monday.

Tension had been simmering between Tangkhul Naga tribe and the Kukis in Ukhrul for more than a week, as around 30 houses were burnt during clashes at Litan Sareikhong area in Ukhrul district.

"The Ukhrul police have evacuated 51 students of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya Ramva School in Ukhrul and handed them over to the Saikul police station team for onward movement to the JNV in Kangpokpi district," the police said in a statement.

Thirty-one male and 20 female students were sent to Kangpokpi, a Kuki-majority district. Police said the students were evacuated as a precautionary measure due to the prevailing law and order situation in the district.

During the evacuation, some members of the public mistook the students for miscreants, the police said, adding that local civil organisations helped the administration in de-escalating tension.

"Their efforts in persuading villagers across the Shangshak, Ramva, Shokvao, TM Kasom, and S Laho areas ensured the safe evacuation of the students," the statement added.

The violence between the Kukis and the Nagas began following a drunken brawl between two groups on the evening of 7 February at Litan. — *PTI*

2 die of food poisoning in Kerala

THIRU'PURAM/ KOLLAM, 17 FEB

Two members of a family died near Nilamel in Kollam a day ago in a suspected case of food poisoning after dining at a restaurant in Vizhinjam here, police said on Tuesday.

Two other members of the family are under treatment, police said, adding that the restaurant has been sealed and food safety officials would soon carry out an inspection there.

Police said that several hundred people ate at the same restaurant on Monday night, but there have been no other complaints of anyone falling ill.

"So, the exact cause of death can be known only after the autopsy. The family said that the problem occurred after they ate from the restaurant," an officer of Vizhinjam police station said.

The family hails from Nilamel near Chadayamangalam in Kollam district. A case of unnatural death has been registered by Chadayamangalam police, the officer said. — *PTI*

MAHASHIVRATRI: MANY ILL AFTER CONSUMING 'KUTTU' FLOUR IN NOIDA

NOIDA, 17 FEB

An FIR has been lodged against a shopkeeper after people fell ill after consuming 'kuttu' (buckwheat) flour during Mahashivratri in Noida, police said on Tuesday.

Residents of Supertech Ecovillage-3, Royal Court Society and Himalaya Pride Society fell ill on Sunday after consuming the flour.

A joint team of the Food Department and Bisrakh police inspected shops in Supertech Ecovillage-3, Royal Court Society and Himalaya Pride Society and collected samples.

Irregularities were found at Prashant General Store in Royal Court Society, which was sealed.

The residents had purchased the buckwheat flour supplied by HD Spices whose warehouse is located in Chipiyana Buzurg.

The Food Department inspected the warehouse and sealed it. The police detained four persons, including the warehouse owner. — *PTI*

2 Iranians held with 200 kg chemical off Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, 17 FEB

The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) and the Coast Guard have apprehended two Iranians with around 200kg of a chemical substance off the Gujarat coast, an official confirmed on Tuesday.

The ATS received intelligence about a suspected chemical being smuggled into Indian waters near the international maritime boundary line (IMBL), approximately 140 nautical miles from Porbandar, said ATS Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Sunil Joshi.

In a joint operation lasting between eight and 10 hours, the two Iranians were detained with 203 packets of suspected chemicals around 8pm on Monday. —*PTI*

Student murdered in Latur college

LATUR, 17 FEB

A student was stabbed to death and three others seriously injured during a clash between two groups of students at a college in Maharashtra's Latur city, police said.

The incident occurred on Monday evening in the college premises on Ausa Road, and four students were later arrested. A clash broke out between two groups of third-year diploma course students of the college after a personal dispute, a police official said.

A student, identified as Vikram Narayan Panchal, 20, who was passing by, was stabbed to death, while three others were injured and admitted to a government hospital for treatment, the official said. Four students were later arrested in connection with the incident, the police said.

After receiving information about the incident, Latur Congress MLA Amit Deshmukh asked the police to curb crime and illegal activities in the city. — PTI

DELHI SUV-BIKE CRASH

Minor driver watching reels ran over biker

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

In a voice choked with grief and anger, a single mother who raised her only child said a "fun reel" – reckless stunts for social media fame – crushed not just her 23-year-old son but all dreams she had for him.

Standing amid his pictures and medals, Inna Makan pointed to quotes written on the wall, "Obsessiome is going to beat talent every time" and "Dream discipline." She said that someone else's fun reel snatched the life and all the dreams she had for her child.

Sahil, a BBA final semester student, was on his way to the office on 3 February when an SUV (Scorpio N), allegedly being driven by a 17-year-old boy with his sister seated next to him, collided head-on with Sahil's motorcycle coming from the opposite direction, killing him on the spot. The SUV later also collided with a stationary cab there, injuring its driver.

Inna Makan, the mother of Sahil Dhaneshra, 23, cries while speaking to the media on Tuesday. Sahil died when an SUV driven by a boy hit his bike —*PTI*

"My son was hard working. He studied in a college in Nainital and was a super performer in sports," she said, her voice breaking.

A clip of the reel surfaced on the internet, showing the SUV charging down a road. About 12 seconds later, the car collides head-on with Sahil's motorcycle. The SUV driver, a 17-year-old boy, did not have a driving licence. He was produced before the Juvenile Justice Board and was granted interim bail on 10 February, as he is a Class 10 student.

Sahil's mother said she heard that the teen's father is a transporter and that the SUV has multiple traffic violations against it. — *PTI*

HC asks Sunjay's wife, sis to restrain themselves

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday ordered Priya S Kapur, the wife of late industrialist Sunjay Kapur, and her sister Mandhira Kapur Smith to refrain from making statements against each other. Justice Mini Pushkarna issued the order on a lawsuit filed by Priya Kapur, alleging a malicious and defamatory campaign by Smith through podcasts, social media posts, interviews, and public statements.

"Both parties are directed to exercise restraint in making statements on each other, directly or indirectly," the judge said. The court summoned Smith and podcast host Pooja Chaudhri for a hearing scheduled in May.

Sunjay Kapur, Priya S Kapur —*PTI*

Priya Kapur claimed her sister-in-law launched a systematic campaign to malign her reputation, falsely imputing dishonesty, professional incompetence, and concealment of assets. She sought a permanent injunction, damages of Rs 20 crore, and a public apology. Priya Kapur has also filed a criminal defamation case against Mandhira Smith in a trial court. — *PTI*

CHINESE LUNAR YEAR BEGINS

Kolkata's Chinese community celebrated the Lunar New Year on Tuesday, ushering in the Year of the Fire Horse after the Year of the Wood Snake. Seventh in the 12 Chinese zodiacs, the Horse symbolises vitality, confidence and success. The festival coincides with China's Chunyun, the world's largest annual human migration, as millions travel home from the cities they are working in for family reunions. This year, a record 9.5 billion domestic trips are expected, including over 1 billion railway and 95 million air journeys —*PTI*

Sabarimala: Women's entry puts Kerala in a tight spot

The renewed judicial scrutiny has placed the CPI(M)-led government under pressure from prominent Hindu caste organisations as well as the opposition Congress and BJP —*PTI*

The contentious issue of women's entry into the Sabarimala temple has once again moved to the centre of Kerala's political debate ahead of the state elections, with opposition parties demanding clarity from the Left government over its stand.

The matter regained prominence after the Supreme Court on Monday reopened the case and announced that a nine-judge bench would begin final hearings on a batch of petitions concerning discrimination against women in religions and places of worship, including the Sabarimala temple.

The renewed judicial scrutiny has placed the CPI(M)-led government under pressure from prominent Hindu caste organisations as well as the opposition Congress and BJP. The Left administration, which had earlier backed the implementation of the court's 2018 verdict permitting women of menstruating age to enter the Lord Ayyappa shrine, said the issue involved several constitutional complexities and that an appropriate position would be taken after discussions.

Opposition leaders, however, urged the Pinarayi Vijayan-led government to immediately submit a revised affidavit before the Supreme Court clarifying its position.

State Law Minister P Rajeev said the matter could not be reduced to a simple "yes or no" answer. He noted that the apex court itself had indicated that review petitions would be considered only after addressing seven broader constitutional questions.

"This is not a situation where a simple 'yes or no' can be stated. Several constitutional complications are involved. All aspects need to be considered," he told reporters, adding that the government had sufficient time to inform the court of its stand.

Rajeev stressed that the government was committed to protecting the faith of believers while also upholding constitutional principles. "Faith and social reform must go hand in hand," he said, reiterating that this had been the position adopted in the state's earlier affidavit.

He pointed out that the government had previously suggested the constitution of a commission of scholars with deep knowledge of Hindu beliefs and a record in social reform to study the women's entry issue. The Supreme Court, however, did not accept that suggestion. The government, he said, continues to stand by it.

The minister also defended the state's actions following the 2018 Supreme Court verdict that allowed the entry of women of menstrual age into the revered shrine. "It was not a government order but the Supreme Court verdict. The apex court verdict is naturally binding. The same Supreme Court later decided to review it. Even then, the earlier verdict has not been stayed," he said.

Rajeev maintained that the government had not taken an adamant stand after the review process began. The issue had triggered massive protests across Kerala in 2018, led by Hindu organisations and opposition parties, when the Left government moved to implement the ruling.

"We will present a good stand before the Supreme Court after examining the constitutional aspects. We have ample time," Rajeev said, adding that a decision would be taken after detailed examination of all factors.

The Congress and the BJP were quick to attack what they described as the government's ambiguity. Senior Congress leader and Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan said the government should be prepared to "correct" the affidavit it had filed earlier.

Addressing reporters in Palakkad, Satheesan alleged that several organisations had been invited to the Global Ayyappa Sangamam after being misled with assurances that the government would change its stand on women's entry.

"If the affidavit is not revised, the government's duplicity will be exposed," he said, accusing the administration of adopting a "confused approach" while simultaneously seeking the votes of Ayyappa devotees.

"How many hours of discussion are required to state that the earlier stand is being changed in view of changed social circumstances? Just ten minutes are needed to file an affidavit," Satheesan added.

BJP state president Rajeev Chandrasekhar also accused the government of taking U-turns on several issues in the past and suggested it might do the same on Sabarimala with elections in mind. "The government can do anything keeping the elections in mind," he alleged, while asserting that there was no change in the BJP's stand on the issue.

Meanwhile, Kerala's two major Hindu caste organisations — the Nair Service Society (NSS) and the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam — reiterated their opposition to allowing women of menstruating age to enter the temple. NSS general secretary G Sukumaran Nair said the organisation had not altered its stand against women's entry at Sabarimala and expressed the expectation that the state government would change its position. SNDP Yogam general secretary Vellappally Natesan said it was inappropriate to permit a practice that had not existed at the temple earlier. He recalled the widespread protests that followed the Supreme Court's 2018 verdict. —*PTI*

SALAR

Greens worried as NGT clears controversial Nicobar project

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has cleared the proposed International Container Transhipment Terminal at Great Nicobar Island, a decision that has triggered sharp criticism from environmentalists and opposition leaders who warn of severe and irreversible ecological consequences.

In an order passed on Monday, the eastern zonal bench in Kolkata, headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava, upheld the environmental clearance (EC) granted to the project, stating that adequate safeguards had been built into the clearance conditions. The tribunal was hearing objections to the proposed terminal, integrated township, area development plan and a 450 MVA gas- and solar-based power plant.

The over Rs 80,000 crore mega project, spread across 166 sq km, involves the diversion of nearly 130 sq km of forest land. It includes a transhipment port at Galathea Bay, an integrated township, a civil- and military-use airport, and a 450 MVA power plant. Environmental clearance was granted in November 2022, with in-principle forest clearance accorded in October 2022.

Senior environmentalist Ashish Kothari had challenged the project, alleging violations of the Island Coastal Regulation Zone (ICRZ) Notification, 2019, and arguing that a high-powered committee (HPC) appointed earlier by the NGT had inadequately reviewed its impacts. Among the concerns raised were the potential displacement of the indigenous Shompen and Nicobarese tribes, as well as the island's vulnerability to earthquakes and tsunamis.

Galathea Bay, the proposed site of the port, is the primary nesting ground for the endangered Leatherback Sea Turtle. Conservationists warn that construction and increased maritime activity could devastate this fragile habitat. The project is also seen as a threat to the Nicobar megapode and saltwater crocodiles. Estimates suggest that between 8.5 lakh and 10 lakh trees may be felled to clear the required forest land, much of it pristine rainforest.

Congress MP and former environment minister Jairam Ramesh described the NGT's decision as "deeply disappointing".

"There is clear evidence that the project will have disastrous ecological impacts," he said in a post on X. He argued that the conditions attached to the clearance would do little to mitigate the long-term consequences. Ramesh added that the matter remains under consideration before the Calcutta High Court, which he described as "the only beacon of hope now".

Debi Goenka, executive trustee of Conservation Action Trust, a Mumbai-based non-profit and one of the petitioners challenging the project, termed the decision "unfortunate". He said their appeal against an earlier NGT ruling is pending before the Calcutta High Court and expressed hope that it would be heard expeditiously.

Former Rajya Sabha MP and bureaucrat Jawahar Sircar reacted sharply, calling the clearance "unbelievable" and "unacceptable". In a post on X, he alleged that the tribunal had effectively cleared "the massacre of irreplaceable flora and fauna" for a port and naval outpost. He warned that the project could wipe out an entire tribe and endanger one of India's most ecologically fragile zones.

The controversy has also drawn intervention from prominent scholars and environmentalists. Seventy academics, former bureaucrats, activists and lawyers had earlier written an open letter responding to Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav's defence of the Rs 92,000-crore infrastructure project. They urged him to set aside political considerations and focus on what they described as the project's "grave and irreversible negative implications".

The signatories included historian Ramachandra Guha, wildlife conservationist Romulus Whitaker, wildlife biologist Ravi Chellam, conservationist Asad Rahmani, scientist Sharachchandra Lele, and former Gujarat principal chief conservator of forests Ashok Kumar Sharma, among others.

This marks the second round of litigation over the project. In April 2023, the tribunal had largely upheld the environmental clearance while constituting an HPC to examine specific concerns raised by petitioners.

In its latest order, the NGT said that adequate safeguards had been provided in the EC conditions and noted that it had previously declined to interfere with the clearance. The tribunal said the remaining issues identified in the earlier round had been examined by the HPC. Considering what it termed the strategic importance of the project, along with other relevant factors, it found no grounds to intervene.

The bench also observed that the island's shoreline would be protected to ensure no loss of sandy beaches, which serve as nesting sites for turtles and birds and act as natural barriers safeguarding the island.

The tribunal acknowledged the project's "vital importance" in terms of national security, its strategic location and potential economic benefits. At the same time, it directed authorities to strictly enforce safeguards relating to tribal welfare, pollution control and biodiversity monitoring.

Despite the clearance, opponents remain resolute. With proceedings continuing before the Calcutta High Court, the legal and environmental battle over Great Nicobar's future is far from over. —*PTI*

NGT said that the island's shoreline would be protected to ensure no loss of sandy beaches —*PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

2 years on, Navalny's death still casts its shadow over Russia

Mourners gathered in Moscow on Monday to mark two years since the death in custody of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, under the shadow of a Kremlin crackdown and just two days since a new analysis reinforced suspicions that he was murdered.

Navalny died in an Arctic penal colony on 16 February, 2024, while serving a 19-year sentence that he believed to be politically motivated. His death at 47 years left the Russian Opposition leaderless and divided, struggling to build an effective or united front without one of its most visible and charismatic figures.

NAVALNY'S SUPPORTERS PAY THEIR RESPECTS

Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, and his mother-in-law, Alla Abrosimova, were among the mourners laying flowers on his grave. A mound of bouquets rose above the heavy drifts of snow that blanketed Moscow's Borisovsky Cemetery.

Addressing the crowd, Lyudmila Navalnaya restated her belief that her son was killed by the Russian authorities, a scenario which has also been backed by several European countries in recent days. "We knew that our son did not simply die in prison," she said. "He was murdered."

The Kremlin has denied the allegations, saying that Navalny died of natural causes.

Flowers were also laid at the memorial to the victims of political repression in St Petersburg. Access to the site was later blocked with temporary fences, local news outlets reported.

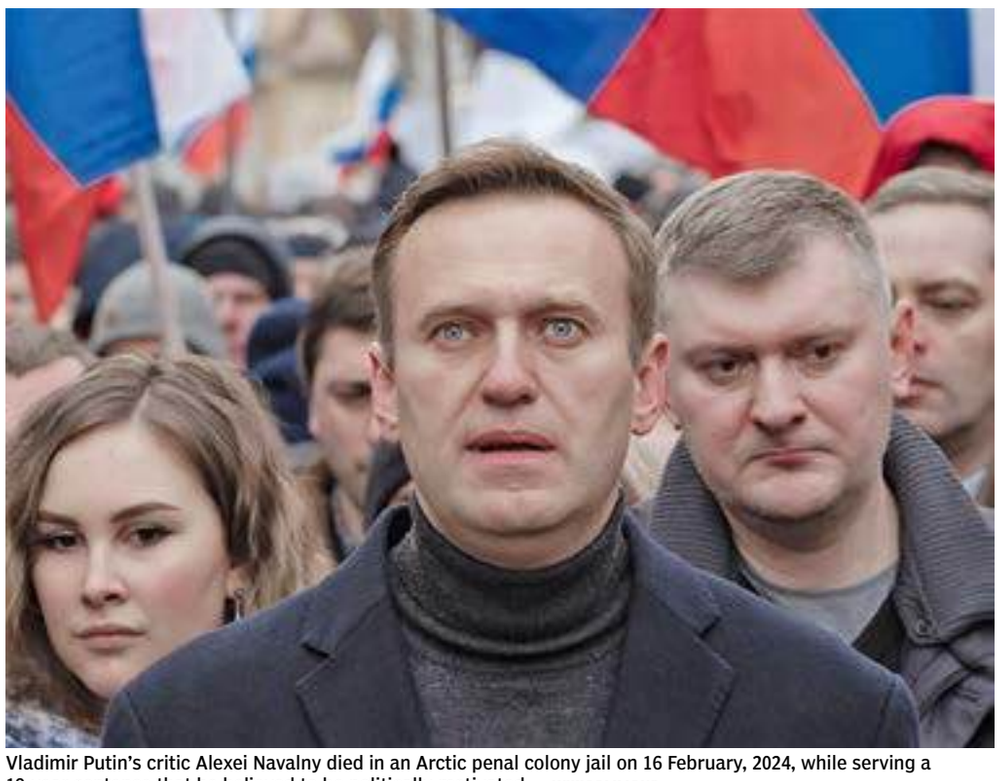
European nations believe that Navalny was murdered

The anniversary coincides with the release of a joint statement by five European countries, which said that Navalny was poisoned by the Kremlin with a rare and lethal toxin found in the skin of poison dart frogs.

The foreign ministries of the UK, France, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands said on Saturday that analysis in European labs of samples taken from Navalny's body "conclusively confirmed the presence of epibatidine." The neurotoxin secreted by dart frogs in South America is not found naturally in Russia, they said.

A joint statement said: "Russia had the means, motive and opportunity to administer this poison."

In a written tribute to Navalny on Monday, French President Emmanuel Macron also linked the Kremlin with the opposition leader's death.



Vladimir Putin's critic Alexei Navalny died in an Arctic penal colony jail on 16 February, 2024, while serving a 19-year sentence that he believed to be politically motivated —*WIKICOMMONS*

"Two years ago, the world learned of the death of Alexei Navalny. I pay tribute to his memory," Macron wrote on social media. "I said then that I believed his death said everything about the Kremlin's weakness and its fear of any opponent. It is now clear that this death was premeditated.

Moscow has vehemently denied its involvement in Navalny's death, saying that the politician had become unwell after going for a walk.

When asked about the allegations by journalists on Monday, presidential spokesperson said that the Kremlin does "not accept such accusations."

Saturday's announcement came as Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, attended the Munich Security Conference in Germany. She said she had been "certain from the first day" that her husband had been poisoned, "but now there is proof." "Putin killed Alexei with a chemical weapon," she wrote on social media, describing the Russian leader as "a murderer" who "must be held accountable."

Navalny was the target of an earlier poisoning in 2020, with a nerve agent in an attack he blamed on the Kremlin. His family and allies fought to have him flown to Germany for treatment and recovery. Five months later, he returned to Russia, where he was immediately arrested and imprisoned for the last three years of his life.

RUSSIA'S OPPN IS STRUGGLING TO START A NEW CHAPTER

Navalny's closest allies, as well as other key members of Russia's Ipposition, now continue their fight from exile.

Many have been handed lengthy prison sentences in absentia in Russia and are unable to return home. Some have been designated "terrorists and extremists" by the authorities, a designation that was also applied to Navalny in January 2022.

Yet Russia's opposition has failed to form a united front and a clear plan of action against the Kremlin.

In one small victory for Opposition activists, Europe's leading human rights body, PACE, announced in late January the creation of a new body — the Platform for Dialogue with Russian Democratic Forces — tasked with giving opposition Russians a voice and a formal platform to engage European lawmakers.

It has been heralded as a victory for anti-war Russians, but also attracted criticism as the body was not elected democratically. Members of Navalny's anti-corruption organisation are also absent from the group

In a statement to mark Navalny's death, Russian members of the Council of Europe's human rights body, PACE, said that Navalny's death was "an inevitable link in a chain of systemic crimes by the Kremlin regime against its own citizens and the citizens of foreign states."

"Alexei Navalny gave his life for a free Russia," the statement said. "We are obliged to ensure that his death was not in vain." —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Civil Rights activist Jesse Jackson dies at 84

CHICAGO, 17 FEB

Jesse Jackson, the veteran civil rights leader and two-time Democratic presidential candidate, died Tuesday at 84. A protégé of Martin Luther King Jr, Jackson rose to prominence after King's 1968 assassination and became one of America's most recognisable voices for racial justice. Founder of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, he championed voting rights, jobs, education and economic inclusion, pressing corporations and governments to expand opportunities for Black Americans. His 1988 presidential bid reshaped Democratic politics under the slogan "Keep Hope Alive." Despite health challenges in recent years, Jackson remained active in public life. Awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2000, he leaves behind a legacy of activism, faith and advocacy for equality. *—PTI*

100 US troops arrive in Nigeria to tackle Islamists

ABUJA, 17 FEB

About 100 US troops and equipment have arrived in Nigeria to train local forces, Nigeria's military said. This follows Nigeria's request for US assistance with training, intelligence, and support in combating Islamic militants and armed groups. The deployment comes after tensions arose when US President Donald Trump accused Nigeria of failing to protect Christians, which Nigeria rejected. Nigeria's Defence spokesman Major General Samaila Uba stated US troops would not engage in combat but would operate under Nigerian command. Last December, US airstrikes targeted IS militants in Nigeria's northwest. The country faces ongoing violence from Boko Haram, IS-linked groups, and bandit gangs, with thousands killed annually. *—PTI*

No support for IS women, kids freed in Syria: Aus govt

MELBOURNE, 17 FEB

Australia's government has announced it won't repatriate 34 women and children connected to Islamic State (IS) from Syria. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said that the they were meant to fly to Australia but were turned back by Syrian authorities. Since 2019, only two Australian groups have been repatriated from Syrian camps with government assistance. Albanese refused to comment on reports that the women and children had Australian passports, affirming that no support would be provided. Opposition leader Angus Taylor asked if the government had considered temporary exclusion orders to block returns. Albanese said any Australians returning would face legal action, citing laws against travelling to IS-controlled territories. *—PTI*

Trump must restore exhibit on slavery: Judge

PHILADELPHIA, 17 FEB

An exhibit of nine people enslaved by George Washington must be restored at his former home in Philadelphia after the Trump administration took it down last month, a judge ruled on President's Day, the federal holiday honouring Washington. The removal came after Trump signed an executive order "restoring truth and sanity to American history," which directed the Interior Department to ensure those sites do not display elements that "disparage Americans past or living." US District Judge Cynthia Rufe ruled that all materials must be restored. She prohibited Trump officials from installing replacements that explain the history differently. *—PTI*

After 17 yrs in exile BNP's Tarique returns as PM

BNP Chief strikes a subdued tone after a rough past

DHAKA, 17 FEB

Tarique Rahman, who lived in London in self-exile for 17 years, has made a remarkable turnaround. The scion of a powerful political dynasties has led the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) founded by his father to a forceful victory after 20 years.

The BNP Chairman was sworn in as Bangladesh Prime Minister on Tuesday.

BNP bagged 209 out of 297 seats, a major turnaround for the party, which was targeted by ousted premier Sheikh Hasina during the Awami League's 15-year tenure.

The BNP was founded by Tarique's father Ziaur Rahman, a military ruler turned politician. The party was led by his mother Khaleda Zia for nearly four decades after the 1981 assassination of president Ziaur Rahman.

Tarique was born on 20 November, 1965, in Dhaka. As a boy, he witnessed Bangladesh's liberation struggle in 1971. He was briefly arrested with his mother and brother but released when Bangladesh gained image from Pakistan.

He studied international relations at the University of Dhaka, dropped out, and later started businesses in textiles and agro products.

BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman signs while taking oath as the new Prime Minister of Bangladesh in Dhaka on Tuesday *—PTI*

Tarique had fled Bangladesh in a self-imposed exile after Hasina's win in 2008. He gradually became more involved in the party's reorganisation abroad.

Under the Awami League's rule, Tarique was a central target of corruption and criminal cases. He was convicted in absentia and sentenced to life in connection with a 2004 grenade attack on Hasina's rally that killed 24 people. He always denied the allegations, calling them politically motivated and was acquitted in all of them during Muhammad Yunus.

In the past, critics viewed Tarique as a brash operator during the BNP's 2001–2006 rule under his mother's leadership. Despite having no government position, he was accused of running a parallel power centre and launching crackdowns on Opposition.

But since his return in December, Tarique has been calling for restraint and reconciliation. He echoed Martin Luther King saying in his first speech "I have a plan for the people of Bangladesh". He has stressed the importance of law and said the country would not slip into authoritarianism again. *—PTI*

2 HINDUS INCLUDED IN 25-MEMBER B'DESH CABINET

DHAKA, 17 FEB

Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman on Tuesday announced a 25-member cabinet following BNP's victory.

The cabinet includes two minority members: Vice President Nitai Roy Chowdhury, a Hindu, and Dipen Dewan, a Buddhist.

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir assumes charge of Local Government, while Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury takes Finance. Salahuddin Ahmed and Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku head Home Affairs and Power, respectively.

Former interim security advisor Khalilur Rahman was named Foreign Minister.

Several senior leaders were notably excluded. BNP secured 209 of 297 seats, Jamaat-e-Islami won 68. The Awami League was barred from contesting.

The election marks a new era after years of instability and nationwide protests in August 2024. *—PTI*

Donald Trump during his 'Apprentice' days seen 'grabbing' a women *—x*

I am exonerated: Trump on Epstein files

WASHINGTON, 17 FEB

US President Donald Trump has yet again brushed away his association with convicted sex criminal **Jeffrey Epstein**.

Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One, Trump claimed, "I have nothing to hide. I've been exonerated. I have nothing to do with Epstein. In fact, Epstein was fighting to stop me from getting elected with some author."

In early February, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt stated that Trump had barred Epstein from his Mar-a-Lago residence for being a "creep." Leavitt said that the release of the Epstein files demonstrates Trump's transparency.

"Unlike others named in these files, President Trump cut off his relationship with Jeffrey Epstein years ago. The release of millions of documents regarding Epstein's crimes reflects this administration's commitment to the truth." Leavitt said. Trump's name has surfaced repeatedly in the files related to Epstein released by the US Department of Justice. He has repeatedly downplayed the relationship.

Epstein, who died in jail in 2019 while awaiting trial, has connections to numerous high-profile figures. *—ANI*

Russia fired 400 drones at Ukraine overnight before the talks on Tuesday *—UKRAINE EMERGENCY SERVICE*

Ukraine, Russia to make 'tough' decisions on land during Geneva talks

GENEVA, 17 FEB

Ukrainian and Russian delegations met in Geneva on Tuesday for another round of US-brokered peace talks as Moscow launched over 400 drones at overnight.

Land and territorial concessions were set to dominated the talks, but expectations were low as neither side appeared ready to budge.

The talks were set to be held over two days.

The future of 20 per cent of Ukrainian land that Russia occupies hangs in the balance.

Discussions on territory are expected to be particularly "tough" said a source as US envoy, Steve Witkoff, and son-in-law Jared Kushner, sit down with the delegations. "Ukraine better come to the table fast," Trump said on Monday.

Also in Geneva will be American, Russian and Ukrainian military chiefs, who will discuss how a ceasefire monitoring might work after any peace deal, and what's needed to implement it.

Russia demands that Ukraine cede control of its eastern Donbas region, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has repeatedly said was a red line.

He said that Russia used drones and missiles of various types to strike 12 regions of Ukraine, injuring nine people, including children.

Zelenskyy said thousands of residents were left without heating and running water in the southern port city of Odesa. *—PTI*

Good progress on nuke talks with US: Iran

GENEVA, 17 FEB

The latest round of talks between Iran and the US on Tuesday ended after three hours, Iranian state TV said. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the two sides had agreed to principles for a deal on Tehran's nuclear enrichment programme.

"The path for a deal has started," Araghchi, who is leading the talks for Iran, said.

"Good progress" has been made in the "indirect" discussions surrounding the lifting of sanctions and Iran's nuclear activities, he said according to state-run Press TV.

Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner were in Geneva for the talks.

The negotiations in Geneva came as Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz to conduct live fire drills. This is the first time that Iran has closed parts of the Strait, an essential international waterway for oil shipments, since the US began threatening military action.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened to strike Iran, and recently deployed a second aircraft carrier to the region. Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned of far-reaching consequences to any military attack.

Meanwhile, Iran is marking 40 days, the traditional Muslim mourning period, since the crackdown.

Earlier, Iranian state media said that talks would not focus on its crackdown on protesters last month. Trump had earlier threatened to strike Iran over its crackdown, but has since dropped the idea as protests appeared to dim amid the mass casualties – estimated to be several times higher than the official 3,000 figure that Tehran claims. *—PTI*

Iran's military drills near the Strait of Hormuz on Tuesday *—PRESS TV*

> They're (Iran) bad negotiators, because we could have had a deal instead of sending the B2s in to knock out their nuclear potential (last June)... I think they want to make a deal. I don't think they want the consequences of not making a deal
>
> —Donald Trump, US President
>
> They keep saying we have sent an aircraft carrier toward Iran. An aircraft carrier is a dangerous device, but more dangerous is the weapon that can send it to the bottom of the sea
>
> —Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran Supreme Leader

Guthrie family not suspects in mom's missing case: Sheriff

WASHINGTON, 17 FEB

Pima County Sheriff Chris Nanos cleared Nancy Guthrie's family as suspects on Monday. The abduction case involving the mother of Today co-anchor Savannah Guthrie has now entered its third week. Guthrie's siblings and spouses have been cooperative as authorities investigate the kidnapping Nancy, 84, went missing from her home on 31 January after her family dropped her home. Investigators on Sunday said they had obtained DNA sample from a glove, which appears to match the pair worn by the masked prowler seen in CCTV footage from the night of her "abduction". *—AGENCIES*

At least 23 killed in Pakistan blasts, gunfire

PESHAWAR, 17 FEB

At least 23 people were killed and two dozen people injured, including several security personnel in multiple strikes that included gun fights and two bomb blast in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tuesday, the military said.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that militants from the banned TTP rammed an explosive-laden vehicle into a checkpost in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bajaur district.

Eleven security personnel and a young girl were killed.

The explosion damaged residential buildings, killing the girl, and injured seven others, including women and children.

The ISPR said that 12 terrorists were eliminated after security forces retaliated and engaged the fleeing militants with precision.

In another incident reported by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police, three police and security personnel and several rebel fighters were killed during a search operation in the Pakistan province's Shangla district.

Police reported that the deceased fighters were allegedly involved in the "attacks which targeted Chinese nationals". *—AGENCIES*

GAVASKAR, KAPIL BAT FOR IMRAN

14 cricket captains seek justice for Imran

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Indian great Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev have joined 12 other former captains to express "deep concern" about jailed cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan's deteriorating health, urging the Pakistan government to provide him adequate medical attention and dignified conditions in line with international standards.

There have been reports that the 1992 World Cup-winning skipper Imran has lost approximately 85 per cent of vision in his right eye due to medical neglect while in custody at Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail.

As many as 14 former captains wrote a letter titled "Appeal by former International Cricket Captains" to the Pakistan government asking for fair treatment for Khan.

Kapil Dev, Imran Khan and Sunil Gavaskar *—PTI*

"We, the undersigned former captains of our national cricket teams, write with deep concern regarding the reported treatment and incarceration conditions of Imran Khan, the distinguished former Captain of Pakistan and a legendary figure in world cricket," the letter said.

"Recent reports concerning his health — particularly the alarming deterioration of his vision while in custody — and the conditions of his imprisonment over the past two and a half years have caused us profound concern.

"As fellow cricketers who understand the values of fair play, honour, and respect that transcend the boundary rope, we believe that a person of Imran Khan's stature deserves to be treated with the dignity and basic human consideration befitting a former national leader and a global sporting icon."

The letter has also been signed by Michael Atherton, Allan Border, Michael Brearley, Greg Chappell, Ian Chappell, Belinda Clark, David Gower, Kim Hughes, Nasser Hussain, Clive Lloyd, Steve Waugh and John Wright. *—PTI*

> "As fellow cricketers, we believe that Imran Khan deserves to be treated with the dignity and basic human consideration befitting a former national leader, a global sporting icon."

Imran's sons seek visas to meet father

Imran Khan's two sons have expressed concern over their father's health at Pakistan's Adiala Jail. Following reports of 85 per cent loss of vision his right eye, as reported by his lawyer on 12 February. Khan's sons Kasim, 26, and Sulaiman, 29, are worried for their father's health, as they await visa clearance. Even though a medical board in Pakistan on Monday claimed Imran Khan's vision had improved, his sons expressed doubts. They also quoted Khan as saying that he had been denied treatment for a few months. *—AGENCIES*

Robert Duvall, 'Godfather' icon, dies at 95 years

– PARAMOUNT PICTURES

LOS ANGELES, 16 FEB

Oscar-winning actor Robert Duvall, whose classic roles included the family consigliere in the first two 'Godfather' movies, has died at age 95.

Robert died peacefully at his home on Sunday in Middleburg, Virginia, according to a statement by his wife, Luciana Duvall. "To the world, he was an Academy Award-winning actor, a director, a storyteller. To me, he was simply everything," Luciana wrote.

Described as bald and wiry, Robert lacked traditional leading-man looks, yet few character actors enjoyed such a long, unpredictable, and rewarding career. He made his debut as Boo Radley in 'To Kill a Mockingbird' and went on to garner seven Oscar nominations through hi illustrious career, winning Best Actor in 1983 for his performance in 'Tender Mercies'.

Robert was also won four Golden Globes, including for his portrayal of philosophical trail boss in 'Lonesome Dove', a role he described as his favourite.

His role in 'The Godfather' (1972) made him one of Hollywood's most in-demand stars.

'Godfather' director Francis Ford Coppola once said, "Actors click into character at different times,the first week, third week. Robert's hot after one or two takes." *—PTI*

Infosys & Anthropic tie up to build AI agents

The AI agents will be deployed to companies in telecom, financial services, mfg and software development

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Infosys on Tuesday announced a strategic collaboration with American artificial intelligence company Anthropic to develop and deploy advanced enterprise AI solutions for companies across telecommunications, financial services, manufacturing, and software development.

The partnership will launch in the telecommunication sector a dedicated Anthropic Centre of Excellence to build and deploy AI agents tailored to industry-specific operations, before expanding into other regulated sectors, Infosys said in a statement.

At the core of the collaboration is the integration of Anthropic's Claude models, including Claude Code, with Infosys Topaz AI offerings. The companies aim to help enterprises automate complex workflows, accelerate software delivery and adopt AI with governance and transparency suited to regulated

environments.

A key focus will be agentic AI-systems capable of independently handling multi-step tasks such as claims processing, compliance reviews and code generation and testing.

Using tools the companies plan to enable AI agents that can operate persistently across long, complex processes. The partnership will also support modernization of legacy systems, combining Infosys Topaz and Claude to accelerate migration and reduce infrastructure upgrade costs.

In telecommunications, AI agents will modernize network operations, streamline customer lifecycle management and enhance service delivery.

AI systems in financial services will detect and assess risk faster, automate compliance reporting and personalize customer interactions.

For software development, teams will use Claude Code to write, test and debug code, accelerating development cycles.

Additionally, shares of Infosys rose more than 3 per cent after the company entered into a deal with Anthropic. On the BSE, the scrip of the company increased 3.27 per cent to Rs 1,410.95 per piece.

Meanwhile, the shares of Tata Consultancy Services on Friday tumbled by 5.42 per cent as investors reacted to mounting fears that AI could upend the traditional outsourcing model that has long powered the sector.—*Agencies*

Nifty IT index surges by 1.03%

MUMBAI, 17 FEB

The Nifty IT stocks rallied on Tuesday, with the majors bringing the IT index up by 1.03 per cent.

Among the IT stocks, shares of Infosys Ltd surged to 1.88 per cent, Oracle Financial Services Software Ltd by 2.34 per cent, HCL Technologies Ltd by 1.50 per cent, Wipro Ltd by 1.21 per cent, LTIMindtree Ltd by 0.73 per cent, Tata Consultancy Services by 0.49 per cent, Tech Mahindra Ltd by 0.48 per cent and Persistent Systems Ltd by 0.28 per cent.

"IT stocks extended gains for the second consecutive session after the recent sharp correction. The sentiment in the sector improved after Infosys announced a strategic partnership with Anthropic, easing concerns around AI-led disruption.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 173.81 points, or 0.21 per cent, to close at 83,450.96. The index moved between a high of 83,598 and a low of 82,987.43 during the day.

The 50-share NSE Nifty advanced 42.65 points, or 0.17 per cent, to settle at 25,725.40.

Among the Sensex constituents, ITC, Bharat Electronics Ltd, Larsen & Toubro, Asian Paints, Titan, Adani Ports, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Maruti Suzuki India, IndiGo, State Bank of India and Tech Mahindra were the major gainers.

A total of 2,447 stocks advanced, while 1,756 declined and 149 remained unchanged. —*Agencies*

Adani to invest $100B in AI data centres

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

The Adani Group announced a USD 100 billion investment on Tuesday to develop hyperscale, AI-ready data centres powered by renewable energy, representing one of the largest integrated energy-compute commitments. The initiative is targeted for completion by 2035.

The group projects the investment will catalyse a further USD 150 billion in secondary investment across server manufacturing and cloud platforms, creating a USD 250 billion AI infrastructure ecosystem in India.

The roadmap expands AdaniConneX's existing 2 GW national data centre platform to a 5 GW target, anchored by partnerships already in place with Google for a gigawatt-scale AI data centre campus in Visakhapatnam, and with Microsoft for similar facilities in Hyderabad and Pune. The group is also deepening collaboration with Flipkart to develop a second AI data centre supporting high-performance workloads and next-generation digital commerce.

Adani Group Chairman **Gautam Adani** framed the initiative as part of a broader global shift, describing the current moment as an intelligence revolution "more profound than any industrial revolution." He argued that nation that master the relationship between energy and computing will define the next decade, and India is uniquely positioned to lead. "India will not be a mere consumer in the AI age. We will be the creators," he said. —*PTI*

Need stronger regulation on deepfakes: Vaishnaw

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

India's IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has called for stronger regulations on deepfakes, warning that their rise poses an increasing risk to children and the general public.

Speaking at a briefing during the AI Summit on Tuesday, he said a consensus must be built with Parliament and social media platforms to introduce tougher restrictions.

The government is consulting platforms such as Netflix, YouTube, Meta, and X on age restrictions and steps to curb deepfakes. Highlighting the need for constitutional compliance, he confirmed that a Parliamentary committee is conducting a detailed review of tech regulations.

"We need much stronger regulations on deepfakes and we must create that consensus within Parliament so society can be protected from the harms of deepfakes," he said.

He noted that age-based regulation is gaining global traction, citing India's Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) framework as an early step in that direction. "That time itself, we took that forward-looking step," he said, referring to provisions in the DPDP that differentiated content accessible to young people. —*PTI*

IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw with New Zealand Minister of Science, Innovation & Technology and Education Shane Reti – *X/@ASHWINI VAISHNAW*

AI CAN SAVE RS 20,000 CRORE IN CARGO HANDLING: EAC-PM MEMBER

India could save Rs 20,000 crore in cargo handling and Rs 15,000 crore annually in logistics by adopting AI at ports, Member of Economic Advisory Council to PM Gourav Vallabh said at the AI Impact Summit. With 95 per cent of trade moved by sea, he stressed smarter infrastructure, AI governance and intelligent ecosystems to achieve Viksit Bharat 2047. —*PTI*

CODING JOBS WILL FADE, NEW ROLES WILL EMERGE: NILEKANI

"Techies will have to deal with a world where writing code will not be the goal," Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani said at the company's Investor Day on Tuesday, addressing fears of AI-led job losses. Taking an optimistic view, he said coding roles may fade, but new ones will emerge, including AI engineers, forward deployment engineers and forensic analysts. —*PTI*

Women make up 30% AI professionals, 16% researchers, says UN

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

UN Women has highlighted that women constitute only 30 per cent of global AI professionals and hold just 16 per cent of research roles.

The organisation urged for increased female involvement to ensure AI tools better address women's needs in health, finance, climate resilience, and safety.

Speaking at the launch of the AI Casebook on Gender and Agriculture at the India AI Summit, UN Women Regional Director Christine Arab warned of systemic bias caused by underrepresentation.

She emphasised that fewer women in AI design leads to products that overlook women's realities, with bias becoming the default when women are absent from design tables.

Arab praised India's efforts in addressing this gap, stating that the country is among the few globally taking this issue seriously. —*PTI*

Rupee rises 5P, closes at 90.69 against USD

MUMBAI, 17 FEB

The rupee gained 5 paise to settle at 90.69 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, backed by positive domestic equity markets and lower crude prices overseas. Sustained outflow of foreign funds and a firm American currency, however, weighed on the Indian currency and capped its gains, forex traders said. In the inter-bank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 90.72 against the US dollar and moved in a tight range, touching a high of 90.64 and a low of 90.78 in intraday deals. The unit finally ended the session at 90.69 (provisional) against the greenback. Meanwhile, the dollar index was trading 0.22 per cent higher at 97.03.—*PTI*

Gold drops to ₹1.57L/10g; Silver falls to ₹2.45L/kg

MUMBAI, 17 FEB

Precious metal prices declined 2 per cent in the national capital on Tuesday, with silver slipping to Rs 2.45 lakh per kg and gold dropping to Rs 1.57 lakh per 10g due to subdued demand amid weak global cues. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the price of silver decreased Rs 5,000, or 2 per cent, to Rs 2,45,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) from Monday's closing level of Rs 2,50,000 per kg.In the bullion market, gold of 99.9 per cent purity depreciated Rs 2,200, or 1.4 per cent, to Rs 1,57,000 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes). The yellow metal settled at Rs 1,59,200 per 10g in the previous session. In the international market, spot silver slipped USD 1.65, or 2.15 per cent, to USD 74.96 per ounce, while gold was trading 1.04 per cent lower at USD 4,938.70 per ounce. —*PTI*

$3,275M COMBINED EXPORTS

India textile exports fall 3.75% in January

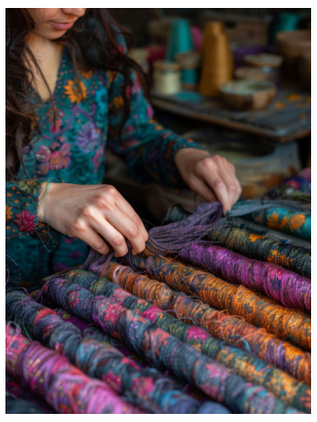
NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

India's textile and apparel exports declined in January year on year, largely due to steep tariffs imposed by the United States that remained in force until 7 February.

According to the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI), textile exports fell 3.68 per cent in January 2026 compared with January 2025, while apparel exports dropped 3.84 per cent.

Combined exports stood at USD 3,275.44 million, down from USD 3,403.19 million a year earlier, marking a 3.75 per cent decline.

Key segments recorded sharp falls. Cotton yarn, fabrics, made-ups and handloom products slipped 4.15 per cent, carpet exports plunged 12.05 per cent, and jute manufactured goods dropped 18.92 per cent. Handicrafts, excluding handmade carpets, also edged lower.



However, man-made yarn, fabrics and made-ups registered marginal growth of 1.01 per cent.

Between April 2025 and January 2026, textile exports contracted 2.35 per cent, though apparel exports rose 1.59 per cent. Overall sector exports dipped 0.65 per cent, while imports of raw cotton and waste surged, indicating stronger domestic demand. —*ANI*

Carrier to invest Rs 1,000 cr in Sri City mfg facility in Andhra

AMARAVATI, 17 FEB

Carrier Air Conditioning & Refrigeration Ltd has signed a lease to set up a Rs 1,000-crore, state-of-the-art air-conditioning manufacturing facility at Sri City in Andhra Pradesh, a move expected to generate around 1,000 direct and 2,000 indirect jobs.

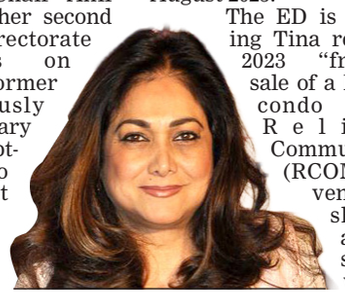
The 39-acre plant will focus on sustainable and energy-efficient cooling solutions, integrating green manufacturing practices to meet growing domestic and global demand. The agreement was exchanged between Sundaresan Narayanan, Managing Director of Carrier India, and Ravindra Sannareddy, Managing Director of Sri City, in the presence of senior state officials.

Carrier India is part of Carrier Global Corporation, a global leader in intelligent climate and energy solutions. State Minister Nara Lokesh said the investment reflects Andhra's "Speed of Doing Business" approach, noting that only eight months elapsed between the firm's first visit and project finalisation. —*PTI*

Tina Ambani skips ED summons again

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Tina Ambani, wife of Reliance Group Chair Anil Ambani, skipped her second Enforcement Directorate (ED) summons on Tuesday. The former actor previously missed a 10 February appearance, prompting the agency to issue this latest notice.



Anil was summoned again on Wednesday in a probe into Reliance Group and their bank loans. He first appeared before the ED in August 2025.

The ED is investigating Tina regarding a 2023 "fraudulent" sale of a Manhattan condo during Reliance Communication's (RCOM) insolvency. Once she does appear, her statement will be recorded under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

The ED alleges that the codo proceeds were funnelled through a "sham investment" in Dubai via a Pakistan-linked individual—an arrangement overseen by recently arrested former president Punit Garg.

As part of a Supreme Court order, an ED special task force is investigating multiple fraud allegations against the Ambani Group. To date, the agency has filed three case reports and attached Rs 12,000 crore in assets. —*PTI*

CLEANMAX TO OPEN RS 3,100 CR IPO ON 23 FEB

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Renewable energy provider CleanMax Enviro Energy Solutions will open its Rs 3,100 crore IPO for public subscription on 23 February, the company announced on Tuesday. The offering closes on 25 February; anchor bidding begins on 20 February and the stock debuts on 2 March.

CleanMax has set a price band of Rs 1,000–1,053 per share, valuing it at Rs 12,325 crore at the upper end. The IPO comprises a fresh issue worth Rs 1,200 crore and an offer-for-sale of Rs 1,900 crore.

The offering is notably smaller than the Rs 5,200 crore IPO CleanMax had initially planned in preliminary papers filed in August 2025.

Founded in 2010, CleanMax specialises in decarbonisation solutions for commercial and industrial (C&I) customers, offering wind, solar, and hybrid renewable power, energy services, and carbon credit solutions.

It holds a 12 per cent share of annual renewable energy capacity additions in the C&I market, with a strong presence in Gujarat and Karnataka.

Financially, CleanMax reported a 13 per cent rise in revenue from operations to Rs 1,610 crore in FY25, with a net profit of Rs 27.84 crore, up from a loss the previous year. —*PTI*

EASIER TO UNDERSTAND

AI to help patients decode complex scan results

LONDON, 17 FEB

Artificial intelligence could soon help patients make sense of complex medical scan results, making them far easier to understand without losing clinical accuracy, a major new study by the University of Sheffield suggests.

The research found that when radiology reports for X-Rays, CT and MRI scans were rewritten using advanced AI systems such as ChatGPT, patients found them almost twice as easy to understand compared with the original versions.

Analysis showed that the reading level dropped from "university level" to one more

closely aligned with the comprehension of a school pupil aged 11-13.

The findings suggest that AI-assisted explanations could become a standard companion to medical reports, helping to improve transparency and trust across healthcare systems, including the National Health Service (NHS.)

Researchers reviewed 38 studies published between 2022 and 2025, covering more than 12,000 radiology reports that had been simplified using AI. These rewritten reports were evaluated by patients, members of the public and clinicians, to assess both patient understanding and clinical accuracy. Radiology reports are traditionally written for doctors rather than patients. However, initiatives promoting patient-centred care mean patient access to these reports has expanded rapidly.

While doctors reviewing these AI-simplified reports found that the vast majority were accurate and complete, around one per cent contained errors, such as incorrect diagnoses. Showing that while this approach is highly promising, it still needs careful oversight. —*PTI*

AI won't replace doctors, says Union Minister

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Union Minister **Anupriya Patel** dismissed fears that AI could replace doctors, asserting the technology will instead benefit the medical fraternity.

Speaking at the AI Impact Summit 2026, she urged the medical community to become AI literate and highlighted government efforts to integrate AI across healthcare, from disease surveillance to diagnosis and treatment.

Patel stressed AI's role in reducing doctors' workloads by automating routine tasks, allowing clinicians to focus on complex cases. She emphasised that AI enhances, rather than replaces, human touch, compassion, and communication in healthcare. She called for clinicians to upskill in AI, insisting that AI's true power lies in its ability to reach marginalised populations & address health inequities.

She noted India's unique healthcare challenges, including rural-urban divides and disease burdens, and showcased AI tools used in the country, such as disease alerts, zoonotic outbreak prediction, and TB detection. Patel stressed the importance of ethical AI use, backed by strong regulatory frameworks. —*PTI*

Australia knocked out of T20 World Cup

Zimbabwe becomes the latest team to advance to the Super 8 stage of the ongoing T20 World Cup 2026

PALLEKELE, 17 FEB

Australia has officially been eliminated from the T20 World Cup after the match between Zimbabwe and Ireland came to an abrupt end due to rain, according to sources.

For Australia to get a chance to get into the Super 8s, Ireland needed to beat Zimbabwe. A win or a washout of the Zimbabwe team was enough to eliminate Australia.

According to the source, this is the second tournament in history where Australia was eliminated in the group stage.

The first time Australia lost its chance to enter the group stage was in 2009 when it lost to the West Indies and Sri Lanka.

Australia's T20 preparations were already suffering from a setback with Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood's injuries.

With this Zimbabwe became the latest team to advance to the Super 8 stage of the ongoing T20 World Cup 2026. Zimbabwe became the 7th team to get a ticket to the Super 8s. With Zimbabwe advancing to the Super 8, the tournament ends for both Australia and Ireland.

Zimbabwe became the 7th team to get a ticket to the Super 8s —PTI

After splitting points with Ireland on Tuesday, Zimbabwe has five points from three matches, while Australia has only two and will not be able to catch up to Sikandar Raza's team even if they win the final group game against Oman on Friday.

Zimbabwe has been placed in Super 8 Group G1, along with India, South Africa, and the West Indies, with all teams playing matches in India.

On the other hand, Sri Lanka, England, New Zealand, and one of Pakistan/USA will constitute Super 8 Group G2, and their matches will be held in Colombo and Pallekele.

After this match, Zimbabwe are second on the Group B points table, just below co-hosts Sri Lanka, which defeated Australia by eight wickets on Monday to seal its place in the Super Eights.

Zimbabwe came off a 23-run win over Australia, having blanked Oman in their opening encounter in this match. —*Agencies*

Abhishek eyes revival today

AHMEDABAD, 17 FEB

An already qualified India will look to sharpen their game and rediscover fluency against spin when they face the Netherlands in their final T20 World Cup league fixture on Wednesday.

Much of the focus will be on **Abhishek Sharma**. One of the most destructive batters in world cricket over the past 18 months, the 25-year-old is yet to fire in the home ICC event. He fell for a duck in the opener, missed the Namibia match with a stomach infection and then registered another nought in the high-stakes clash against Pakistan.

Fortunately for India, Ishan Kishan's imperious form has ensured Abhishek's lean run has not hurt the team. However, four ducks in his last six innings suggest he may need to reassess his powerplay approach. Teams have clearly done their homework: aware of his preference for the deep cover boundary and limited scoring options behind the wicket, opponents have stationed fielders accordingly.

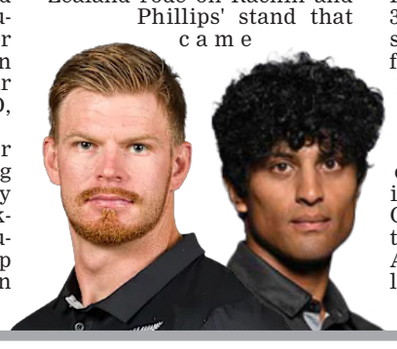
With progression secured, the Netherlands game offers Abhishek an ideal opportunity to regain rhythm. India were clinical against Pakistan, powered by Kishan and a disciplined bowling unit. —*PTI*

Phillips, Rachin's blazing 50s power New Zealand into Super 8

CHENNAI, 17 FEB

Glenn Phillips was back at his best blasting the fastest fifty for New Zealand in T20 World Cup history as he and Rachin Ravindra struck fluent half-centuries to power them to an eight-wicket win over Canada, and seal their Super 8s berth from Group D, here on Tuesday.

In a must-win contest for both teams, Canada, opting to bat, were powered by Yuvraj Samra's record-breaking 110 -- the youngest century-maker in T20 World Cup history -- but the 146-run unbroken Rachin-Phillips stand and an undisciplined bowling effort ultimately overshadowed the milestone knock. Chasing 174, New Zealand rode on Rachin and Phillips' stand that came off just 73 balls, overhauling the target in 15.1 overs. Phillips remained unbeaten on 76 from 36 balls with six sixes and four fours, while Rachin was 59 not out from 39 balls (4x4, 3x6) in their statement win. The Kiwis finished their league campaign with six points and a net run rate of 1.227.



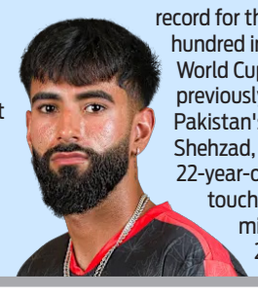
Having already qualified, South Africa lead the group on net run rate and face UAE in their last league match. Canada remain winless from three matches and next face Afghanistan in their final league fixture. —*PTI*

Canada's Indian-origin batter Yuvraj becomes youngest to hit hundred

Canada's Indian-origin batter **Yuvraj Samra** became the youngest to score a hundred in the T20 World Cup's history when the 19-year-old smashed a career-best 65-ball 110 against New Zealand in a Group D match here on Tuesday.

- The record for the fastest hundred in the T20 World Cup was previously held by Pakistan's Ahmed Shehzad, who was 22-year-old at that time.

The youngster, who was named after Indian swashbuckler Yuvraj Singh by his cricket fan father Baljit Samra, was playing only his 19th T20 International since making his debut in March last year. The record for the fastest hundred in the T20 World Cup was previously held by Pakistan's Ahmed Shehzad, who was 22-year-old when he touched the milestone in 2014. —*PTI*



MATCHES TOMORROW

Pak faces must-win against Namibia

Pakistan, struggling after a defeat to India, must beat winless Namibia to secure a spot in the Super 8s of the T20 World Cup. Led by Salman Ali Agha, Pakistan's fragile batting was exposed in Colombo. Their key players, including Babar Azam and Shaheen Afridi, face pressure to perform. Namibia's disciplined skipper Gerhard Erasmus and bowlers like JJ Smit could cause an upset. Pakistan's victory is crucial; a loss could see them eliminated. The match starts at 3.00pm. —*PTI*

SA's Brevis seeks form against UAE

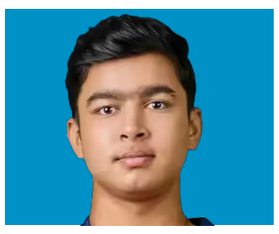
Dewald Brevis aims to regain his batting form in South Africa's final Group D game against UAE. Despite South Africa's progression to the Super 8, Brevis, nicknamed 'Baby AB', has scored only 6, 23, and 21. The 22-year-old is expected to capitalise on the Kotla pitch before the big game against India. UAE's key batsman Sohaib Khan, with two successive fifties, will look to shine. The match begins at 11am. —*PTI*

ANI

Asia's Rising Stars: India thrash Nepal, enter semis

BANGKOK, 17 FEB

Senior India bowlers Tanuja Kanwar and Minnu Mani produced a dominant display as India A defeated Nepal by seven wickets to reach the semi-finals of the Women's Asia Cup Rising Stars on Tuesday. Kanwar claimed 4 for 12 and Mani took 3 for 8 as Nepal were bowled out for just 78 in 18 overs, with Radha Yadav adding 2 for 17. India A chased down 82 for 3 in only 7.5 overs. Dinesh Vrinda struck an unbeaten 39 off 18 balls, hitting nine boundaries to seal victory with eight overs to spare. India A top Group A with four points and a strong net run rate. —*PTI*



PTI

Vaibhav marked absent for missing Class 10 exam

SAMASTIPUR, 17 FEB

U-19 World Cup winner Vaibhav Sooryavanshi was marked absent for his Class 10 CBSE board exam at Podar International School in Bihar on Tuesday. Principal NK Sinha explained that Sooryavanshi's absence was in line with CBSE policy, stating, "He is absent today. He has not come to the examination centre. We have marked him absent according to the policy of CBSE... If a student is absent, we have to mark him absent." Sooryavanshi, who scored 439 runs in seven matches at a strike rate of 169.50 in the tournament, was Player of the Match in the final for his 175 off 80 balls. He is preparing for the 2026 IPL with Rajasthan Royals and is expected to take the next exam. —*ANI*

Hardik to lead India in Pro League as Harmanpreet quits

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Mid-fielder Hardik Singh was on Tuesday named captain of the embattled Indian men's hockey team for its FIH Pro League matches in Hobart from 20 to 25 February after regular skipper Harmanpreet Singh opted out due to "personal reasons."

"Harmanpreet Singh will not be part of the squad due to personal reasons," Hockey India said in a statement.

A source close to the player said that the seasoned campaigner would be missing the games to welcome his second child with wife Amandeep Kaur.

The new captain Hardik is a two-time Olympic bronze-medallist. The team will also feature youngsters including Amandeep Lakra and Manmeet Singh, who made their debut appearances for the senior team during the Rourkela leg.

Suraj Karkera and Mohith Honnenahalli Shashikumar will share the goalkeeping responsibilities. Pawan, who was there in the Rourkela leg, makes way for Mohith in the squad.

The upcoming leg of the tournament will feature India alongside Spain and hosts Australia at the Tasmania Hockey Centre in Hobart.

Mid-fielder Hardik Singh —ANI

- A source close to the player said that the seasoned campaigner would be missing the games to welcome his second child with wife Amandeep Kaur.

The side lost all its four matches in the just-concluded Rourkela leg, which included a shocking 0-8 drubbing at the hands of Argentina.

"After a disappointing four matches in Rourkela, where the results didn't go our way, we've learned some good lessons and made some notable improvements," India coach Craig Fulton said.

"Going into the Hobart leg, we're aiming for improved performances and looking to finalise our squad for the World Cup and the Asian Games," Fulton said. —*PTI*

Pratika added to team Oz for ODI series

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

Batter **Pratika Rawal** has been recalled to India's women's squad for the upcoming three-match ODI series against Australia after making a full recovery from an ankle injury.

The 25-year-old was sidelined during the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025 after sustaining the injury while fielding against Bangladesh. She was replaced in the squad by Shafali Verma, as India went on to clinch their maiden World Cup title.

In a statement, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) confirmed that the Women's Selection Committee had added Rawal to the squad for the ODI leg of the on-going multi-format tour of Australia. It said she had successfully completed her rehabilitation at the BCCI Centre of Excellence and had fully recovered from the injury suffered in October.

The ODI series begins in Brisbane on 24 February, with the remaining matches scheduled to be played in Hobart on 27 February and 1 March.

Rawal has also been named in India's squad for the one-off Test against Australia, starting in Perth on 6 March. —*PTI*

Barcelona's Lamine Yamal argues with Girona's Joel Roca during a Spanish La Liga soccer match between Girona and Barcelona in Girona, Spain —PTI

Yamal misses penalty as Barcelona slips in La Liga

GIRONA, 17 FEB

FC Barcelona missed the opportunity to go top of La Liga after suffering a 2-1 defeat away to Girona FC on Monday.

The result leaves Barcelona second, two points behind Real Madrid, and marks their second defeat in less than a week, increasing pressure on Coach Hansi Flick.

Lamine Yamal struck the post with a penalty just before half-time. However, Barcelona took the lead 14 minutes into the second half when Pau Cubarsí headed in from a cross by Jules Koundé. The goal was their 100th in all competitions this season.

Girona equalised three minutes later through Thomas Lemar, who finished from close range after good work by Vladyslav Vanat. With three minutes remaining, substitute Fran Beltrán scored the winner with a low shot from inside the box.

Joel Roca was sent off late on, but Girona held firm to end a three-match winless run. —*PTI*

- The result leaves Barcelona second, two points behind Real Madrid, and marks their second defeat in less than a week, increasing pressure on Coach Hansi Flick.

Nabi's 9-wicket haul secures J&K Ranji final spot

KALYANI, 17 FEB

Auqib Nabi's remarkable nine-wicket match haul has put Jammu and Kashmir on the brink of their first Ranji Trophy final after they dismissed Bengal for 99 on day three.

Nabi's aggressive 42 from No. 9 helped turn the tide after Mohammed Shami's career-best 8/90 from 22.1 overs couldn't prevent Bengal's collapse in just 25.1 overs.

Set a target of 126, Jammu and Kashmir reached 43/2 at stumps, needing 83 more runs.

They lost Shubham Khajuria and Yawer Hasan to Akash Deep but Shubham Pundir remained unbeaten on 23, with Vanshaj Sharma on nine. Despite Bengal's home advantage, they face an uphill battle to reach the final.

Shami's disciplined bowling, exploiting the fifth-stump channel, completed his third five-wicket haul of the season. Nabi, the leading wicket-taker, struck early in Bengal's second innings, trapping Sudip Chatterjee lbw for a duck and dismissing Gharami for another duck.

Nabi's figures of 4/36 from 10 overs, combined with Sunil Kumar's 4/27, sealed Bengal's collapse.

Bengal, aiming for their first title since 1989-90, now face an uncertain future after a sudden and damaging defeat. —*PTI*

WINTER OLYMPICS

Meyers Taylor finally gets gold for US

MILAN, 17 FEB

Small margins decided gold medals at the Milan Cortina Olympics as Eileen Gu had to settle for another silver in defence of her big air ski freestyle title and Elana Meyers Taylor of the US finally won bobsled gold in her fifth Olympics.

The 41-year-old American won that long-awaited medal by just four hundredths of a second in women's monobob when the last competitor, Germany's Laura Nolte, made a small but costly mistake on her final run.

It was still a remarkable performance from Gu, the San Francisco-born skier for China who hadn't competed in big air in the four years since winning gold at the 2022 Olympics.

Bobsledder Elana Meyers Taylor —WIKIPEDIA

The athlete who beat Gu to the gold in slopestyle last week, Switzerland's Mathilde Gremaud, was ruled out of the big air final when she injured her hip in practice hours before.

LINDSEY VONN BACK IN US FOLLOWING CRASH

Meanwhile, Lindsey Vonn is back home in the US following a week of treatment at a hospital in Italy after breaking her left leg in the Olympic downhill at the Milan Cortina Games. "Haven't stood on my feet in over a week... been in a hospital bed immobile since my race. And although I'm not yet able to stand, being back on home soil feels amazing," Vonn posted on X with an American flag emoji. "Huge thank you to everyone in Italy for taking good care of me."

The 41-year-old Vonn suffered a complex tibia fracture that has already been operated on multiple times following her 8 February crash. —*PTI*

- Elana Meyers Taylor won that long-awaited medal by just four hundredths of a second in women's monobob in the last competition

Sreejesh re-applies for Jr Men's Hockey coach role

NEW DELHI, 17 FEB

PR Sreejesh, legendary Indian goalkeeper and two-time Olympic bronze medallist, has re-applied for the position of India's junior men's hockey team chief coach.

MMHis previous contract ended on 21 December, after guiding India to a historic bronze at the FIH Men's Hockey Junior World Cup in Chennai December. Sreejesh, who aims to become the senior team's coach, said, "I have reapplied when the advertisement came. I knew some six to seven others have also applied. Let's see what happens now."

Reflecting on his coaching journey, Sreejesh said, "It has been a wonderful learning experience where I gave insights from my international career. The bronze medal was a highlight, although we targeted gold. After retirement, my goal was to give back to the game by passing on my knowledge."

Hockey India secretary general Bhola Nath Singh mentioned that six to seven candidates have shown interest, with screening and interviews scheduled over the next 7-14 days.

Meanwhile, he addressed India's recent poor performance in the FIH Pro League, which saw four consecutive defeats, including an 8-0 loss to Belgium. Despite this, he assured there is no cause for concern ahead of upcoming major tournaments like the Asian Games and the World Cup. —*PTI*